THE 2006 NOISEMAKER AWARDS

SPECIAL ISSUE

BLENDER

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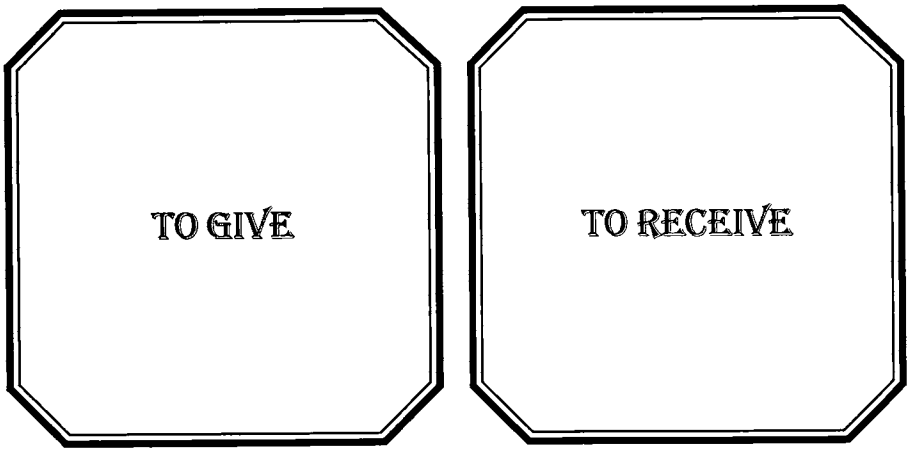

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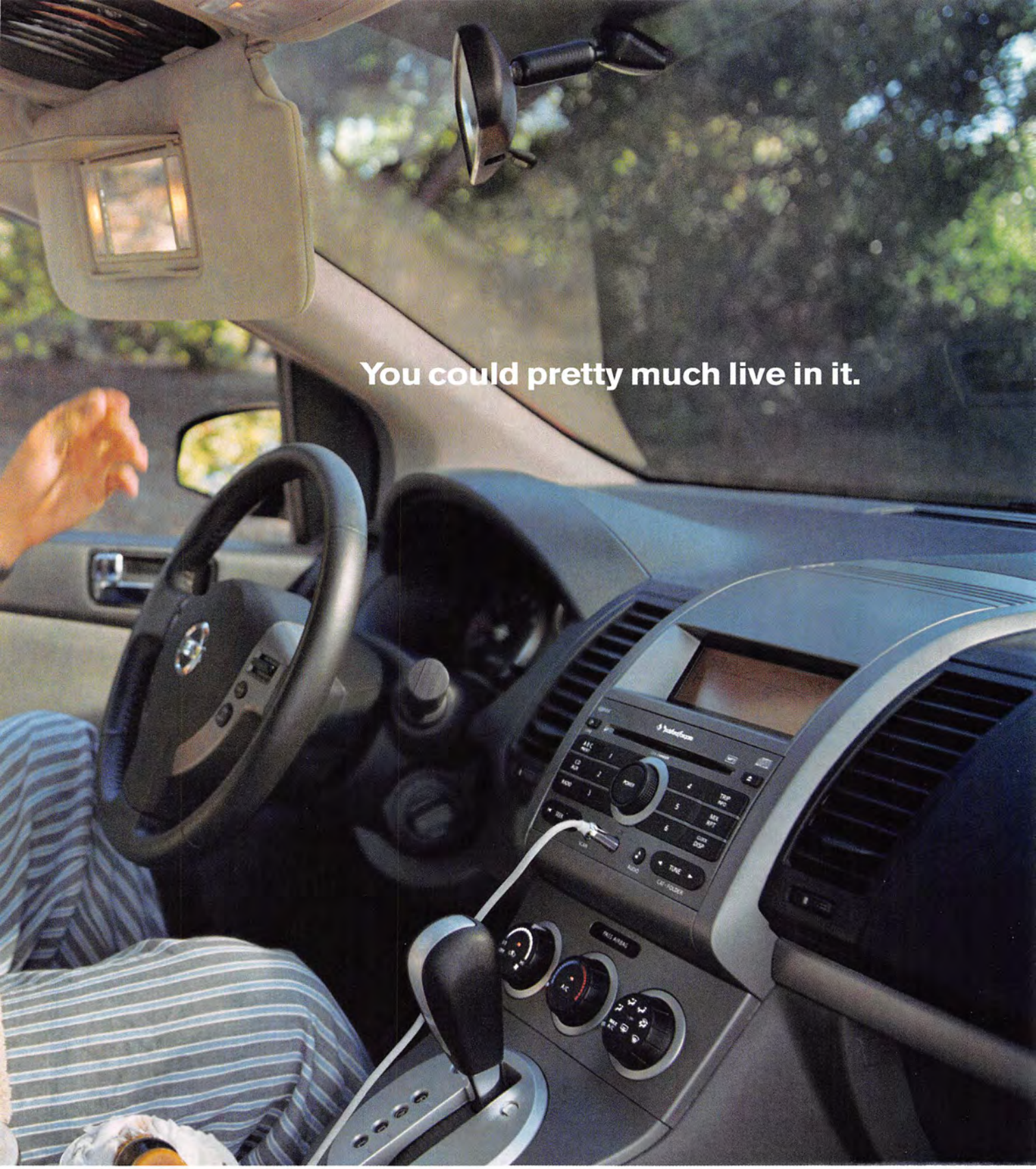

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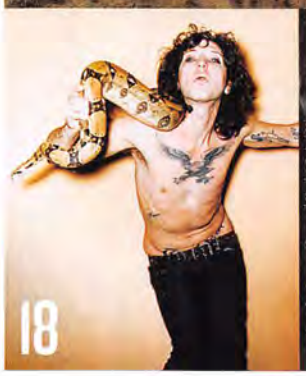

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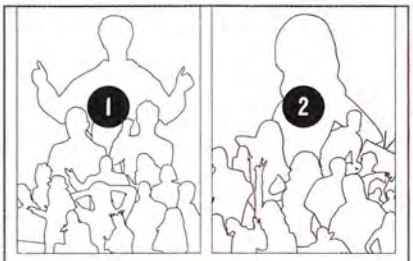

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MICK JONES: PENNIE SMITH

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FOR ANYTHING

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You've Got Mail

Because Sharing Is Caring ...

My Chemical Romance's dressing room leaves much to be desired.

We Love a Man in Uniform

> I'm relieved to hear My Chemical Romance lead singer Gerard Way was on the prowl for corduroys and "normal" clothes in your cover story ("Kings of Pain," December)—I can't imagine it's comfortable to always be in that stiff marching-band gear all day.

Jay Metcalf, Augusta, GA

Not to mention all the wedgies he gets from the jocks during lunch.

Saviors, Indeed

> This might sound absurd, but after reading your cover story on My Chemical Romance, I think the troubled band members make for admirable role models. They were outsiders in school and overcame alcohol and drug addiction, and they are the anti–Tom Cruise, with their acceptance of depression and anxiety as real ailments.

Karenn Meyeorson, Ocean City, MD

Antiques Roadshow

> Thanks for giving an old-timer a treat with your Jerry Lee Lewis interview (Dear Superstar, December). I thought I knew what a hell-raiser he was, marrying his cousin and all, but that was only the tip of the iceberg. Surviving wives and sons, taking speed and crashing his car into Graceland? They don't make 'em like that anymore.

Rich Luce, Winter Haven, FL

Now What?

> So, right after that Lukas Rossi chump wins his dream gig on *Rock Star: Supernova* or whatever ("I'm With the Band," December), saying things like "We were all meant to be in a band together," bassist Jason Newsted gets injured and can't play. Does this mean CBS is gonna load up a mansion full of Derek Smalls clones and audition replacements on TV?

Jenna Reinkens, Lexington, KY

This, in fact, is on the network's midseason schedule, right along with *CSI: Lexington, KY*.

An Awesome Mind Puzzle

> I totally respect that *Rock Star: Supernova* winner Lukas Rossi doesn't listen to other musicians or songwriters for fear they'll influence his work. But won't that be problematic, considering the album he's working on is pretty much singing other people's material?

Ken Hogue, Winston-Salem, NC

Going Back to Cali

> Your "25 Greatest Songs About L.A." list (December) was like Julia Roberts's permagrin. With her two front teeth pulled out. Ya know why? Because there are two gaping holes where the Eagles' "Hotel California" and Led Zeppelin's "Going to California" should be.

Javelin Elliott, via e-mail

***Javelin*! You haven't written in months. Where you been? We've missed you. The gauntlet's been thrown down: Best. Reader name. Ever. Hey, have you seen that photo on the Internet of the girl with a javelin through her foot? It's pretty gnarly. Did you have anything to do with that?**

K-Fed's New Galaxy

> I guess you can go ahead and remove Kevin Federline from the "Slept Their Way Into It" section of your "Star Maps" (December), since he's really not "in it" and he's certainly not "sleeping" his way anywhere anymore. Except maybe into the next *Surreal Life* cast.

Jordan Semel, Butte, MT >>

If Pop Stars Were Dogs ...

Send us a photo and tell us which music celebrity your pooch resembles. If we print it, you'll win this awesome Delphi SKYFi3 Portable XM Radio.

< RICK JAMES THE POP STAR >

< MATTIE THE DOG >

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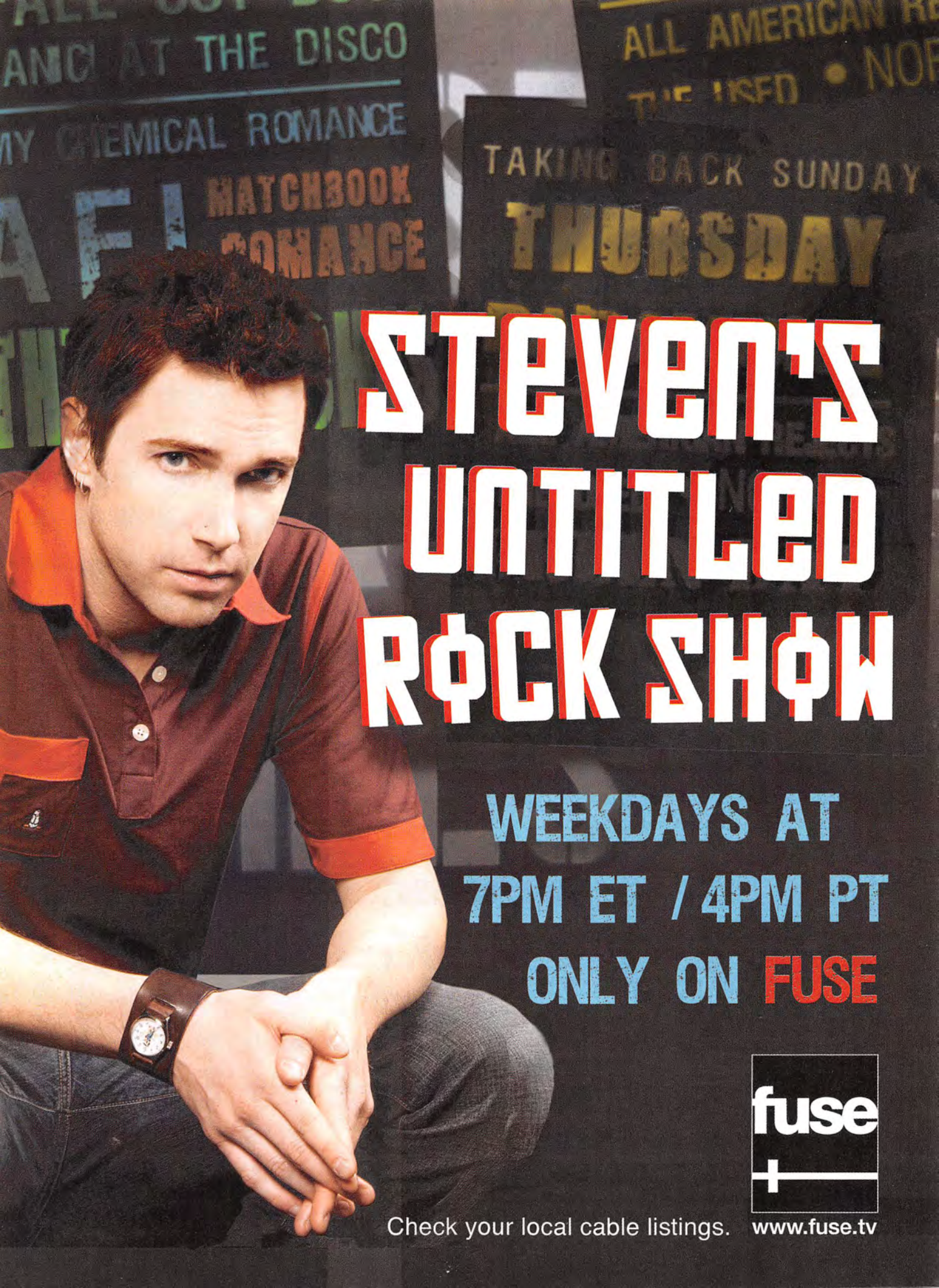
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This photo concept just didn't work as well with Ruben Studdard.

Wouldn't You Like to Be a Pepper, Too?

> For the "Most L.A. Thing About Them" section of "The 25 Greatest Songs About L.A.," I don't know how you narrowed it down to just two things that make the Red Hot Chili Peppers so L.A. How about the fact that Flea dates models? Or that Anthony Kiedis dates models? Or that John Frusciante dates models?

Kiera Fyer, River Falls, WI

In *Blender*'s defense, the long, time-honored tradition of rock stars bedding models is by no means limited to the greater Los Angeles area—we'd like to refer you to the dossiers of noted non-Angelinos Stewart, Rod, and Jagger, Mick, to name just two. But it could also be argued that the most L.A. thing about the Red Hot Chili Peppers is that *all they freaking sing about is L.A.*

Get Back

> I was about to write an angry screed about your pan of the new Who album (The Guide, December), calling *Blender* ageist punks disrespecting rock's grizzled forebears for trying to add to their long-cemented legend. Then I flipped a few pages and saw you gave the new Beatles album five stars, so I'm not really sure what my point is.

M. Joseph, Bloomfield Hills, MI

Us neither. But keep in touch!

Who Wouldn't?

> Jared Leto is the biggest effing poseur on planet Earth ("Life on Mars," December). But I'd still sleep with him.

Sarah Moen, Hobart, IN

A McPheever You Can't Sweat Out

> That's a pretty hot picture of the usually demure *American Idol* contestant Katharine McPhee ("Who Does Katharine McPhee Think She Is?" December). The accompanying article showed a different side of her, too (getting drunk and breaking hearts). I don't suppose publishing this letter would give you guys an excuse to run another picture of her, would it?

Chris Lelchuk, Warren, PA

You played us like a fiddle.

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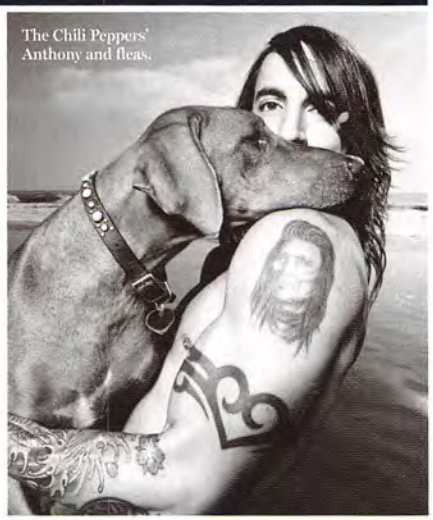

The Chili Peppers' Anthony and fleas.

MCPHEE: MICHAEL SHARKEY; KIEDIS: ANDREW MACPHERSON/CORBIS OUTLINE.

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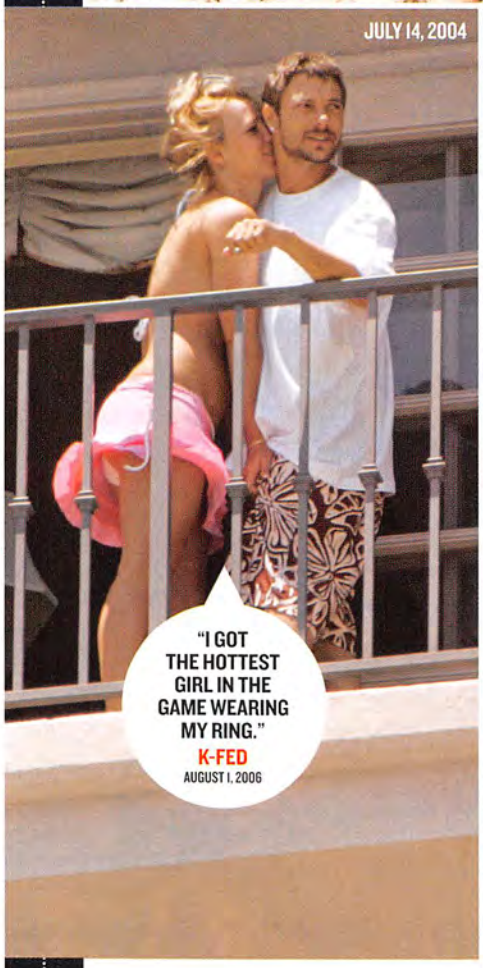
APRIL 24, 2004

"I KISSED A BUNCH OF FROGS AND FINALLY FOUND MY PRINCE. I FEEL LIKE I'VE FOUND MY HAPPILY EVER AFTER."
BRITNEY
JULY 1, 2004

OCTOBER 10, 2004

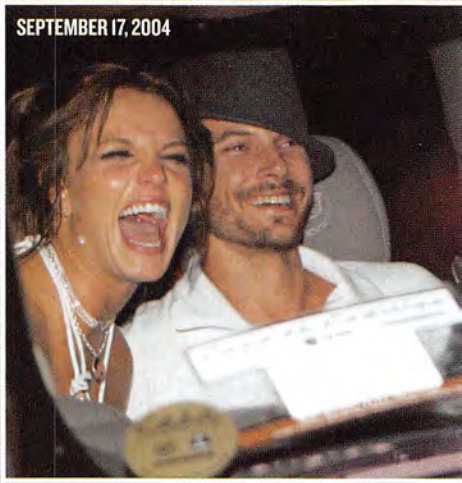


JULY 14, 2004

"I GOT THE HOTTEST GIRL IN THE GAME WEARING MY RING."
K-FED
AUGUST 1, 2006

BYE, Y'ALL

WITH HANKY IN HAND, *BLENDER* TAKES A TEARY LOOK BACK AT **BRITNEY SPEARS** AND **KEVIN FEDERLINE**'S TWO-YEAR TABLOIDTASTIC MARRIAGE, FROM THE PROMISING, MEMBER-GRABBING START TO THE BITTER-DIVORCE-NOTICE-VIA-TEXT-MESSAGE END...



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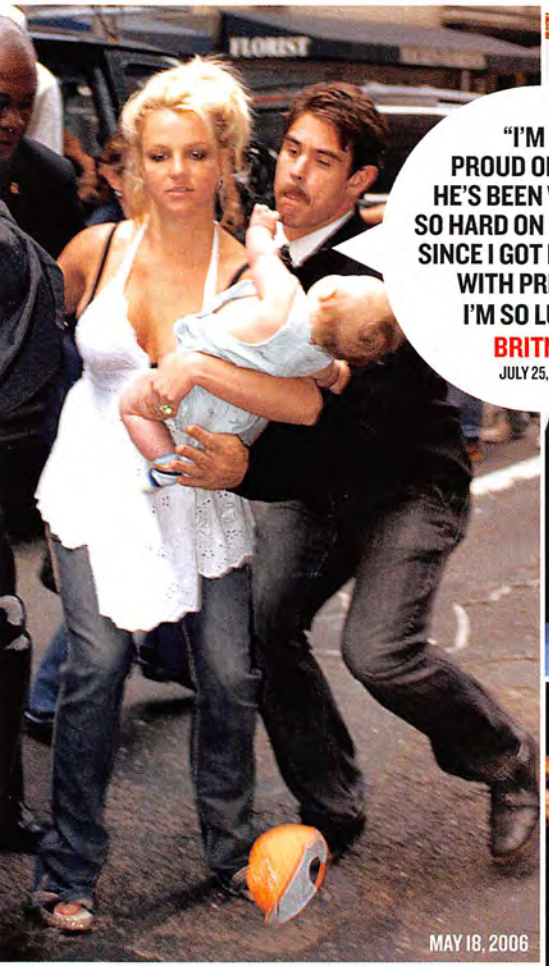
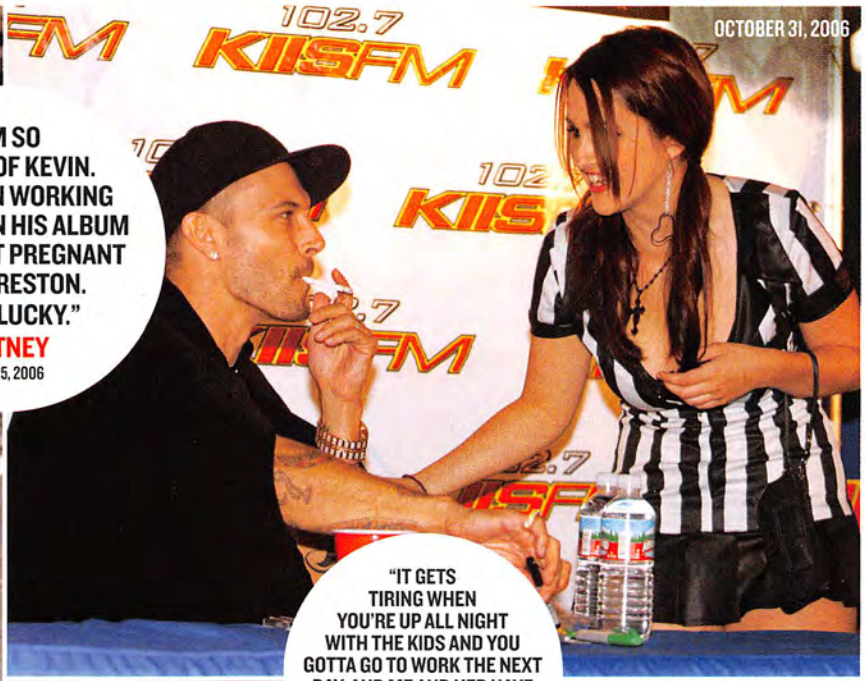


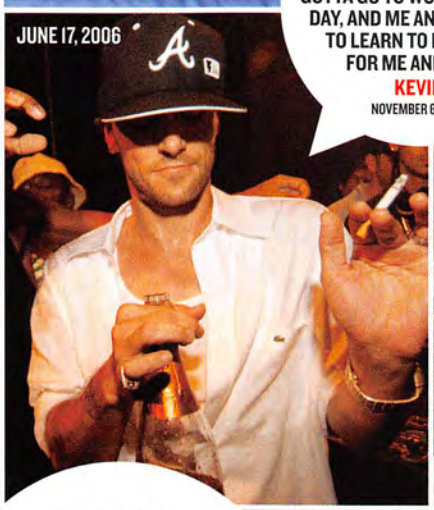
"I'M SO PROUD OF KEVIN. HE'S BEEN WORKING SO HARD ON HIS ALBUM SINCE I GOT PREGNANT WITH PRESTON. I'M SO LUCKY."
BRITNEY
JULY 25, 2006

MAY 18, 2006



OCTOBER 31, 2006

"IT GETS TIRING WHEN YOU'RE UP ALL NIGHT WITH THE KIDS AND YOU GOTTA GO TO WORK THE NEXT DAY, AND ME AND HER HAVE TO LEARN TO FIND TIME FOR ME AND HER."
KEVIN
NOVEMBER 6, 2006

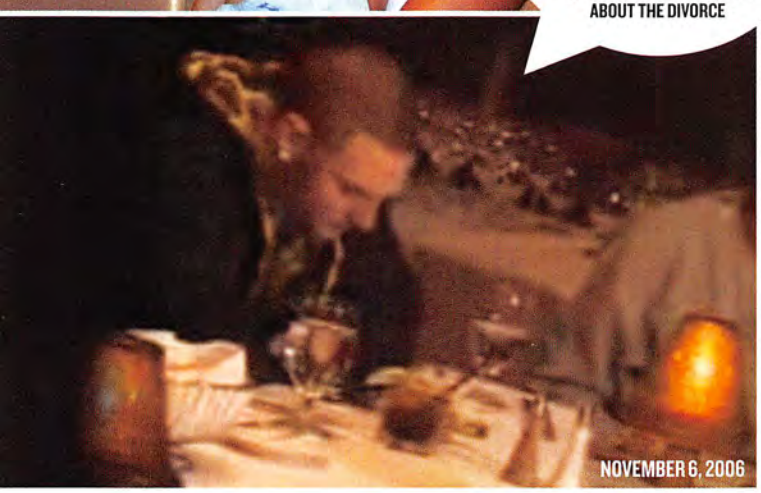


JUNE 17, 2006

FEBRUARY 23, 2006

MAY 18, 2006

"YOU KNOW I'M A FREE MAN, RIGHT, LADIES? YOU WANNA DANCE WITH A PIMP?"
K-FED
NOVEMBER 8, 2006, ONSTAGE IN CHICAGO, TWO DAYS AFTER HE RECEIVED A TEXT MESSAGE ABOUT THE DIVORCE



NOVEMBER 6, 2006

"YOU *PAID* FOR KEVIN'S CD?"
BRITNEY TO WILL FERRELL ON THE *LATE SHOW WITH DAVID LETTERMAN*

NOVEMBER 6, 2006

(ALMOST FAMOUS)

MICKEY AVALON

A NOT-SO-REFORMED HOOD RAT MINES JUNKIE/WHORE PAST FOR COMIC-RAP GOLD

(By David Peisner ✱ Photograph by Kenneth Cappello)

✱ MICKEY AVALON IS on a train headed to New York City, but he should be at a sound check in New Jersey. "I ditched my manager," he says. "He keeps sending me nasty text messages."

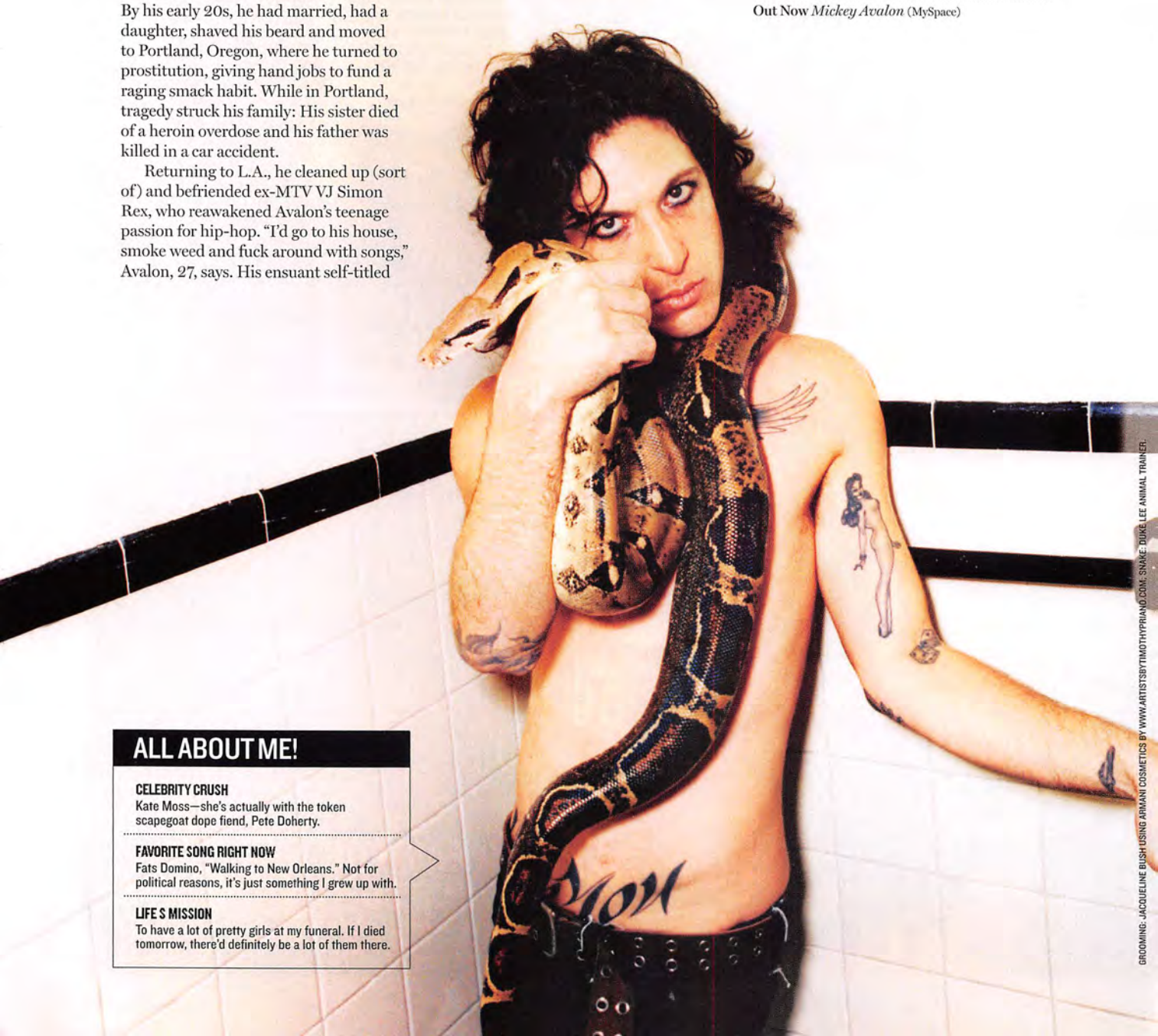
For Avalon, chaos has been a lifelong companion. Growing up in Los Angeles, his dad was a heroin addict and his mom a pot dealer, a profession he acquired at age 14. In his late teens, the rapper (born Yeshe Perl) became an Orthodox Jew. By his early 20s, he had married, had a daughter, shaved his beard and moved to Portland, Oregon, where he turned to prostitution, giving hand jobs to fund a raging smack habit. While in Portland, tragedy struck his family: His sister died of a heroin overdose and his father was killed in a car accident.

Returning to L.A., he cleaned up (sort of) and befriended ex-MTV VJ Simon Rex, who reawakened Avalon's teenage passion for hip-hop. "I'd go to his house, smoke weed and fuck around with songs," Avalon, 27, says. His ensuant self-titled debut—the first release in a joint deal between MySpace and Interscope—is a glam rap record about Hollywood's seedy underbelly and the ugliness of his own life (and penis), told through the wry eyes of a filthy Borscht Belt comic.

Over squishy synths on "Waiting to Die," he raps, "I used to work nights at hotcock.com/But then I got fired when my mom logged on." On "So Rich, So Pretty," he says, "She gets naughty with her Pilates body/And thinks it's really funny when her nose goes bloody." And on "My Dick," he claims, "My dick cost a late-night fee/Your dick got the HIV."

Given his past and over-the-top persona, his shirtless, pelvis-baring live shows border on voyeuristic. "It's another form of prostitution," he says. "It just doesn't smell as bad."

Out Now *Mickey Avalon* (MySpace)



ALL ABOUT ME!

CELEBRITY CRUSH
Kate Moss—she's actually with the token scapegoat dope fiend, Pete Doherty.

FAVORITE SONG RIGHT NOW
Fats Domino, "Walking to New Orleans." Not for political reasons, it's just something I grew up with.

LIFE'S MISSION
To have a lot of pretty girls at my funeral. If I died tomorrow, there'd definitely be a lot of them there.

GROOMING: JACQUELINE BUSH USING ARMANI COSMETICS BY WWW.ARTISTSBYTIMOTHYPRIANO.COM; SNAKE: DUKE LEE ANIMAL TRAINER.

The Reverend Robert Brooks delivers a U2 Eucharist.

WWU2D?

CHURCHES SPREAD THE GOSPEL OF **U2** BY PLAYING THEIR SONGS, ROCKING THE MASSES

HE'S COZIED UP to the pope, rubbed rosaries onstage and sung about "the victory Jesus won." Now Bono's God-centric exploits have been recognized by U.S. churches. An Episcopalian rector in Maine has designed a Eucharist service around U2's music.

"We thought it would be a one-time experiment," says the Reverend Paige Blair of St. George's Episcopal Church in York Harbor, Maine. "But it's spread like wildfire." Since 2005, Blair has helped over 250 churches from as far away as South Africa and Holland design their own version of what she calls "the U2charist."

The services not only focus on the underlying spiritual message in songs like "Mysterious Ways," "When Love Comes to Town," "Pride (In the Name of Love)" and "One," but also embrace U2's commitment to social justice. The rock band's lyrics are projected, via PowerPoint slides, to screens on the altar, "for people to be hands-free for dancing and clapping," says Blair. Statistics about global poverty are included in the presentation.

Blair has also been considering crafting a new "rock revival" service that might include tunes by Van Morrison and Bob Marley, but she dismisses the notion that services like these are merely ploys to lure younger parishioners.

"It's not about trying to be cutting-edge," she says. "It's acknowledging that there's a great spiritual resource here that's going to speak to several different generations. I'm in touch enough with my own aging that I don't imagine this is something that's really going to bring in the youth." *David Peisner*

U2CHARIST SERVICES HAVE "SPREAD LIKE WILDFIRE."

NEWS ROUNDUP

STEVIE NICKS created the Stevie Nicks Soldier's Angel Foundation, an organization that sends iPods to wounded American soldiers. After visiting military hospitals, the singer said, "I'm going to fill iPods with my favorite songs, and I'll take them with me every time I go back."

Jam band the **STRING CHEESE INCIDENT** plan to break up next summer after 14 years together. Guitarist Billy Nershi will work with his other band, Honkytonk Homeslice.

BLOC PARTY were forced to cancel tour dates with Panic! At the Disco after their drummer suffered a collapsed lung in Atlanta.

Slain **PANTERA** guitarist Dimebag Darrell Abbott received a star on the Hard Rock Café's Walk of Fame in Dallas. Dimebag's brother, drummer Vinnie Paul, accepted the posthumous honor.

WORD!

"I LIKE TO DO IT FOR A LONG TIME."
DIDDY ON LOVEMAKING

BUMMED!

KELIS SHOWS OFF HER HARD WORK AT THE GYM—IN CONCERT

R&B siren Kelis performs at New York nightclub Capitale to celebrate *Out* magazine's Out100 issue and to promote her record *Kelis Was Here*.

The sexy "Milkshake" singer, who is married to rapper Nas, shakes her almost-bare booty onstage while a live backing band accompanies her.

Known for her sexually aggressive songs, the 26-year-old former choir singer shows the crowd her seriously aerobicized *badonkadonk*.

NAS: JOHNNY NUNEZ/WIREIMAGE.COM; KELIS: GOTCHA TV/SPLASH NEWS (3); BROOKS: STEVEN SENNE/AP PHOTO; U2: PEROU; DIDDY: BENNET REAGLIN/WIREIMAGE.COM.

MAN-DATE

TOMMY LEE AND LUKAS ROSSI SWAP SPIT, MAKEUP RESIDUE

1

This fall, recently crowned victor of *Rock Star: Supernova*, Lukas Rossi, met up with his drummer Tommy Lee outside Hollywood nightclub Element.

2

Rossi, who worked as a line cook before winning the competition, embraced Lee, clutching him at his bare, tattooed waist. The pair exchanged an intimate glance.

3

Lee, who once confessed to *Blender* that his "dick is hard all the time," passionately reciprocated Rossi's advance, kissing him deeply—with tongue.

NEWS ROUNDUP

EDDIE VAN HALEN tapped his 15-year-old son, Wolfgang, as the new bassist for a reunited Van Halen. Wolfgang replaces Michael Anthony, who complained about money issues and hasn't spoken to Eddie since the band's 2004 tour.

GRATEFUL DEAD bassist Phil Lesh has undergone surgery for prostate cancer. "I fully expect to have a rapid and complete recovery," said Lesh. "I am feeling energetic as always, and all my scheduled appearances will occur as planned."

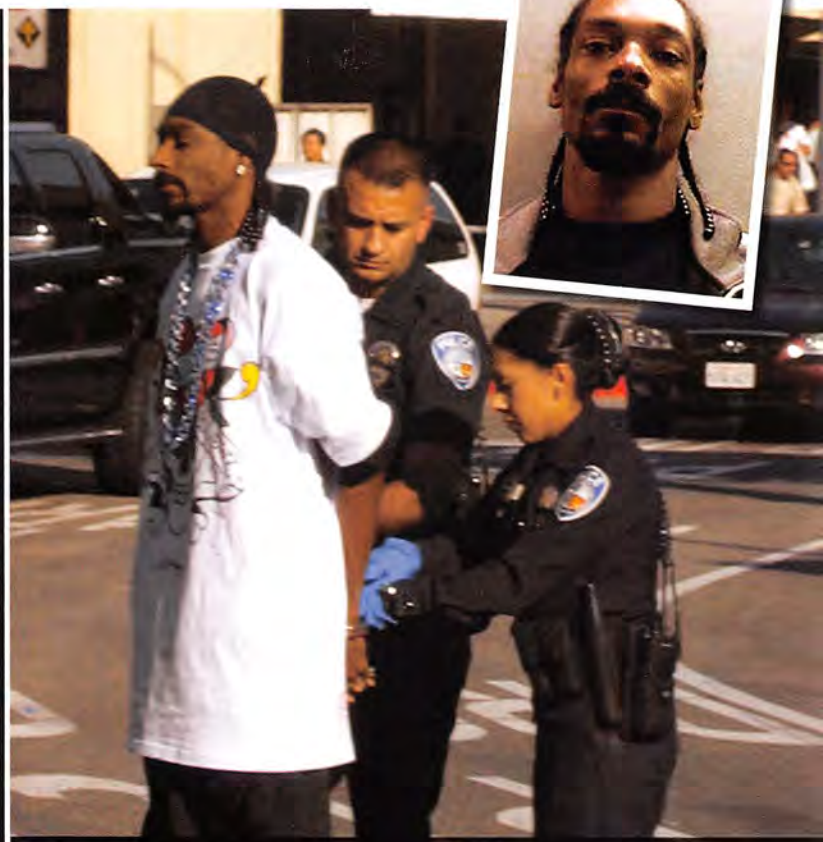
A judge ordered **PETE DOHERTY** to pay $1,350 in fines after assaulting a BBC reporter. The troubled fiancé of Kate Moss initially denied the charges but after being shown footage of the attack, changed his plea to guilty.

ARCTIC MONKEYS are releasing an official autobiography. The band was said to be unhappy when an unofficial biography was released earlier this year.

WORD!

"EMO IS BULLSHIT!"

BRENDON URIE OF PANIC! AT THE DISCO



GROUNDED!

AIRPORT PO-PO CUFF **SNOOP DOGG** YET AGAIN, THIS TIME ON HIS HOME TURF

SNOOP DOGG WAS arrested on October 26 after police reportedly found marijuana and a handgun in his vehicle at a Burbank, California, airport. One month earlier, he was arrested for alleged possession of a deadly weapon after security at an Orange County airport found a collapsible baton in his laptop bag. And last April, Snoop was arrested on charges of violent disorder and affray after his entourage was denied access to a British Airways first-class lounge in London's Heathrow Airport. Seven policemen were injured in the melee, and Snoop was banned permanently from the airline.

BLENDER'S BURNING QUESTION

WHAT WILL THE DEFINITIVE **MEN'S STYLE** TREND OF 2007 BE?

SURVEY SAYS

READER WISDOM

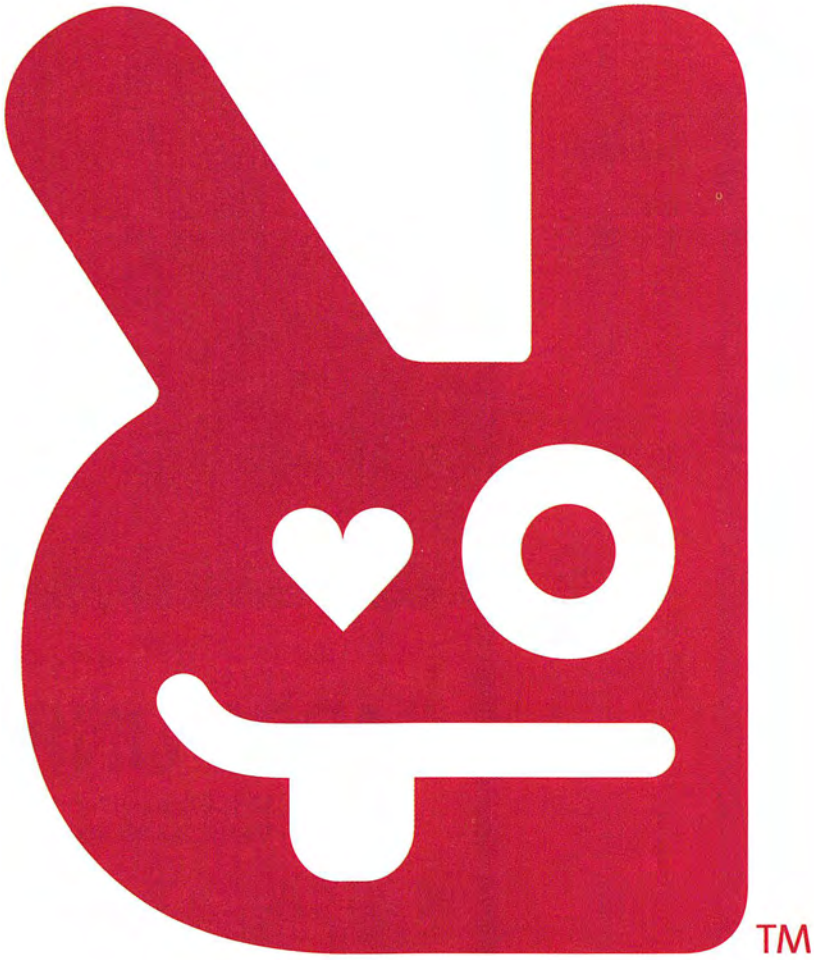
"'STACHES KEEP YOUR UPPER LIP WARM."

BLAINE O'BRIEN, BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

Log on to Blender.com for the next "Burning Question." One deserving reader will have his/her thought-provoking comment published in the magazine and win the Sony Ericsson W600, a cell phone with a Walkman music player.

LEE AND ROSSI (4): INFOGOFF.COM; SNOOP INSET: HO NEW/REUTERS; SNOOP ARREST: MALIBU MEDIA; FLOWERS: GEORGE PIMENTEL/WIREIMAGE.COM; URIE: JOHNNY NUNEZ/WIREIMAGE.COM.

 "Of course I said I loved you not just 'cause you insisted/How much longer? A man could get arrested."



MEET FLIRTY

How's it hangin'?

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beRED.com

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DEE SNIDER

DOES TWISTED SISTER FRONTMAN DEE SNIDER INDEED ... ROCK?

LARGEST NUMBER OF PEOPLE YOU'VE WOKEN UP NEXT TO IN A HOTEL BED?
I don't know, but the largest person would be Twisted Sister's bass player, Mark Mendoza.

BEST RUMOR ABOUT YOURSELF?
I'm a devil worshipper, and a Marine.

BIGGEST CELEB'S HOME YOU'VE EVER GOTTEN DRUNK IN?
I don't drink, but I've been to Lemmy's [from Motörhead] house.

BRUSH WITH THE LAW?
I was arrested for assault with a deadly weapon in a road-rage incident. A guy tried to run me off the road, so I hit him with a tire iron.

WORST TOUR HORROR STORY?
One time a guy threw a bottle at me and I swan dived off the stage to get him. But this was before stage diving was in vogue. When I jumped off the stage, the seas parted and I bruised my leg bone.

STUPIDEST THING YOU'VE EVER EATEN?
A human placenta. We mixed it with McCormick stew mix.

LAST PERSON YOU WANTED TO KILL OR INJURE?
The director of my movie *Strangeland*, John Pieplow.

BEST HIGH?
Getting onstage at 51 years old and blowing everyone's fucking mind.

VERDICT

BETWEEN HANGING OUT WITH LEMMY AND EATING HUMAN PLACENTA, HE'S PRETTY MUCH GOT IT COVERED. DEE SNIDER ROCKS BIG-TIME!

OUT NOW *A TWISTED CHRISTMAS* RAZOR & TIE

NEWS ROUNDUP

Christopher Walken will play the role of **OZZY OSBOURNE** in the film adaptation of the raunchy Mötley Crüe autobiography *The Dirt*. Val Kilmer is in talks to play David Lee Roth.

Perpetually soused **POGUES** lead singer Shane MacGowan has lost two more teeth after drunkenly falling and smashing his face. "He was a bit shaken and sore—and gutted, because he hasn't got that many teeth to lose," said a friend who witnessed the spill.

Guitarist Tom Conrad left emo band **THE ACADEMY IS...**, before the recording of their sophomore album, due to creative differences.

JEWEL chose not to renew her contract with Atlantic Records because of the current state of the music industry. "It's a lot harder for labels to make their bottom lines, and the artist is going to suffer for it," she said.

WORD!

"THEY ARE SUPERIOR TO STRAIGHT PEOPLE."

MOBY ON GAYS

Adam Levine: "Ooh wee ooh, I look just like Buddy Holly."

IN THE STUDIO

"MORE UNIVERSAL"

MAROON 5 AND THEIR STARLET-DATING FRONTMAN PREPARE A FUNKY, ROMANCE-LADEN NEW ALBUM

ADAM LEVINE IS in rough shape. The Maroon 5 singer was up late last night, downing Patrón shots at L.A.'s Whisky Bar. How drunk was he? "Drunk enough," he groans.

The groggy frontman has to freshen up fast: Maroon 5 are in the studio today, putting the finishing touches on their long-time-coming second album. It's been almost half a decade since their debut, the 4 million-plus-selling *Songs About Jane*, and apparently the natives are restless. "Our fans are about to kill us," Levine says. "They're very disgruntled."

He claims the band's new songs are some of the funkiest they've done. "I've been listening to a lot of early Prince—*Dirty Mind*, *Controversy*, all that shit." On the other side of the spectrum is a "Beach Boys–y" ballad called "I Won't Go Home Without You," one of Levine's favorites. "I came up with the hook driving home one night," he says. "And as I turned my car off and walked inside, I thought, Wow—we actually are going to have a career past our first record."

Lyrically, the new material is as relationship-centric as it's always been. "I've tried to write political songs," Levine says. "But somehow it always comes back to women." Still, while he's been linked to A-list babes Natalie Portman and Jessica Simpson, don't expect much dish. "People are going to speculate up the wazoo. The first record was targeted directly at someone—very angry, very fuck you. But this record is more universal. I've got plenty of heartache to draw upon." *Josh Eells*

ALL ABOUT OUR RECORD

ARTIST: Maroon 5
PRODUCER: Mike Elizondo and Spike Stent
STUDIO: Conway Recording Studios, L.A.
LAST ALBUM: *Songs About Jane*, 2002
NEW ALBUM: As yet untitled, due this spring

ALSO IN THE STUDIO

Jane's Addiction singer **PERRY FARRELL** is in L.A. recording a new album, featuring an appearance by Fergie, as well as 30-year-old Jim Morrison vocal tracks.

R&B singer and pelvic phenom **D'ANGELO** is at work on his third record, his first since 2000's platinum-selling *Voodoo*—in New York, with Dr. Dre producing.

Destiny's Child's **KELLY ROWLAND** is working on her sophomore record, the follow-up to 2002's *Simply Deep*, with producers Scott Storch and Polow Da Don.

SNIDER: SHIRLAINE FORREST/WIREIMAGE.COM; MAROON 5: IAN BROOK; ROWLAND: JON KOPALOFF/FILMMAGIC.COM; MOBY: ROB LOUD/WIREIMAGE.COM.

 "Mr. Rogers, I like your cardigan sweater/Mr. McFeelie, shut up and give me my letter."

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20 SONGS YOU SHOULD DOWNLOAD THIS MONTH

1 **YOUNG JEEZY**
"J.E.E.Z.Y." *DEF JAM*
Nothing beats a rapper referring to himself in the third person, as this taunting bragfest so exquisitely proves.

2 **GWEN STEFANI**
"WIND IT UP" *INTERSCOPE*
The weirdest slab of sound Gwen has ever served up darts from yodeling to marching-band clatter to wormy drum & bass sounds to *The Sound of Music* samples. Somehow, it works.

3 **CLIPSE**
"TRILL" *RE-UP GANG/JIVE*
One of the stunning highlights from their new album, featuring one nasty storm of synths and even nastier rhymes.

4 **THE KILLERS**
"READ MY MIND" *ISLAND*
A great new-wave slow-burner from the Las Vegas rock chameleons.

5 **RICH BOY**
"THROW SOME D'S" *ZONE 4/INTERSCOPE*
From Mobile, Alabama, a drawling MC boasting about his rims—and, with an assist from Polow Da Don—making it sound fresh.

7 **JOHN LEGEND**
"SHOW ME" *G.O.O.D./COLUMBIA*
The tweed-'n'-cardigan don takes a break from the ladies and asks God why the world is so stinky.

8 **LCD SOUNDSYSTEM**
"45:33: NIKE + ORIGINAL RUN" *[ONLINE]*
Don your ironic headband and pull up the athletic socks—available on iTunes, it's the hippest workout routine since *Sit and Be Fit*!

9 **CADILLAC DON AND J MONEY**
"PEANUT BUTTER & JELLY" *ASYLUM*
Superminimal Dirty South ode to cars that look like Jif on the inside, Smucker's on the outside. Rote materialism was never so scrumptious!

10 **BRAND NEW**
"SOWING SEASON (YEAH)" *TINY EVIL/INTERSCOPE*
The Long Island emo grads explore crises of faith, howl like hell!

11 **JAY-Z**
"LOST ONES" *ROC-A-FELLA*
Hov gets teary-eyed about his split with Damon Dash, the death of his nephew and what sounds for all the world like a Beyoncé breakup—over one sweet piano loop.

12 **BABY BOY DA PRINCE FEAT. LIL BOOSIE**
"THE WAY I LIVE" *UNIVERSAL REPUBLIC*
From two Louisiana hip-hop newbies, a powerfully hummable ode to the fly life, set to charming acoustic guitar.

13 **THE SHINS**
"PHANTOM LIMB" *SUB POP*
A dreamy, midtempo return from the Portland, Oregon, indie heroes—featuring that smoove, smoove James Mercer falsetto.

14 **PAOLO NUTINI**
"JENNY DON'T BE HASTY" *ATLANTIC*
A doe-eyed, raspy-voiced Scottish heartbreaker kicks out this catchy single about bedding older women.

15 **ANNIE STELA**
"IT'S YOU" *CAPITOL*
Michigan-born piano-playing songstress delivers a sweeping devotional jam perfect for a *Grey's Anatomy* montage.

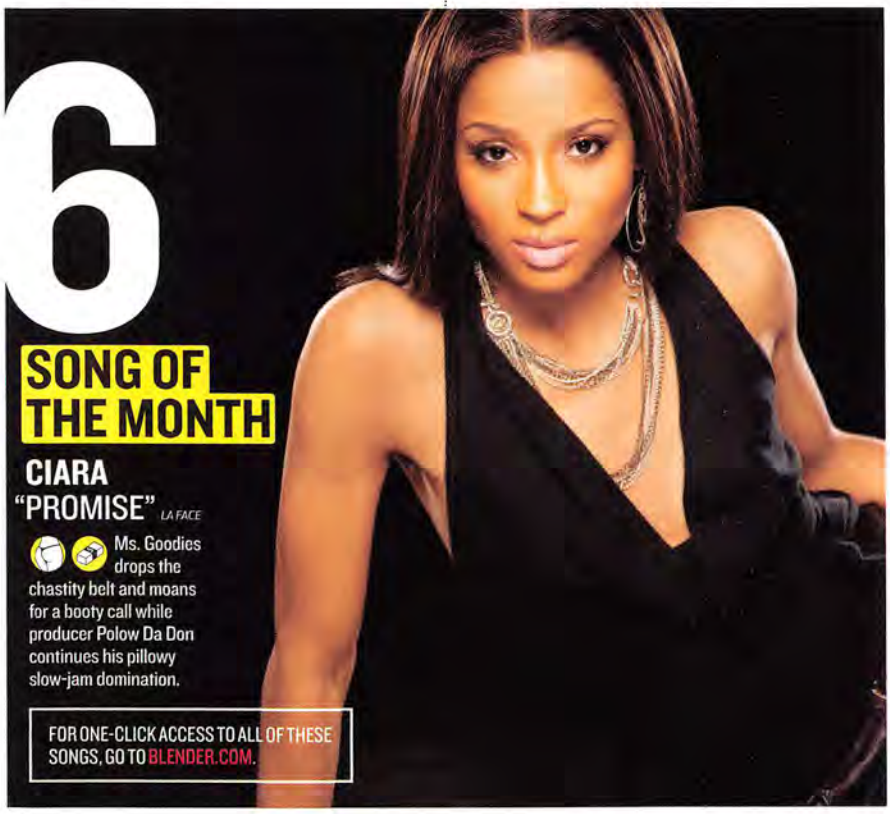
16 **MODEST MOUSE**
"DASHBOARD" *EPIC*
Now with 100 percent more Johnny Marr, the Seattle indie-rock kings serve up a spiky celebration of one shit-wreck of a car.

17 **PINK NASTY**
"AWAY MESSAGE" *[ONLINE]*
Gloriously muddy guitars and relationship woes from an Austin singer-songwriter with a weird streak.

18 **UNK FEAT. ANDRE 3000 AND JIM JONES**
"WALK IT OUT" (REMIX) *BIG OOMP*
Two ATLiens—including one who sounds fiercer than he has since *Stankonia*—and one Harlemite taunt enemies and big-up the good life on top of minimal electro.

19 **ART BRUT**
"NAG NAG NAG NAG" *DOWNTOWN*
Unrivaled in snarky irono-punk, Eddie Argos and Co. burn through some atypically poignant—but typically riff-heavy—introspection.

20 **YING YANG TWINS**
"JACK IT UP" *TVT*
Dirty electronic squelch, irresistible '80s dance beats and a growled litany of stripper instructions: in other words, prime Ying Yang.



6 SONG OF THE MONTH

CIARA
"PROMISE" *LA FACE*
Ms. Goodies drops the chastity belt and moans for a booty call while producer Polow Da Don continues his pillowy slow-jam domination.

FOR ONE-CLICK ACCESS TO ALL OF THESE SONGS, GO TO BLENDER.COM.

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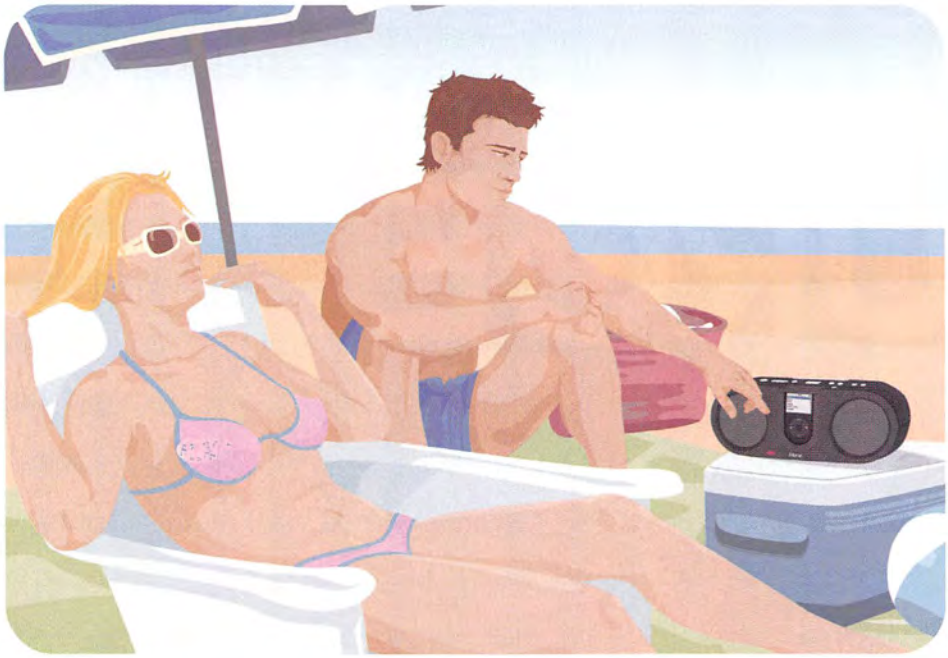
live



life

loud

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INSIDER

KNOWING STUFF IS GOOD

Puzzlingly, the penny didn't flatten, but it *did* turn into a lager and smokes.

MICK JONES

ANSWERS YOUR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE CLASH, KATE MOSS AND SID VICIOUS (p. 32)

CLASH: PENNIE SMITH; FROG: DAVID AUBREY/SCIENCE PHOTO LIBRARY; OASIS: MICHAEL SPENCER JONES.

The Michael Jackson doll: More realistic-looking than the actual Michael Jackson.

THE MOST AWESOMELY DEMENTED FANS IN MUSIC

PHISHHEADS LEAVE THEIR JOBS, CLAYMATES ISSUE DEATH THREATS, JUGGALOS GO ON THE RAMPAGE WITH MACHETES—AND THEN THERE ARE THE ONES WHO ARE REALLY CRAZY

(By David Peisner)

JACKO WACKOS

MICHAEL JACKSON FAN CLUB

SETTING *HIS*TORY STRAIGHT

> To Michael Jackson's true believers, his problems all stem from media persecution. His semi-official fan club—which grosses around $250,000 a year and has a staff that has included an official poet and a team of lawyers and investigators—often directs fans' energies toward evening the score. They've protested Sony's inadequate promotion of *Invincible* and the broadcast of *Living With Michael Jackson*. And hardcore nutters from as far away as Norway relocated to California for Jackson's 2005 child-molestation trial.

Justify your love: "Michael's too big for people to understand," says Jeannette Manbrink, 29, a Swede who camped outside the courthouse late last year.

Checkin' out the ladies: Clay Aiken with Claymates in 2003.

Army of him: A still from crazed Björkie Ricardo Lopez's video suicide note.

More Faygo, stat: A dejected Juggalo at an Insane Clown Posse gathering in 2006.

IDOL PURSUITS

CLAYMATES

DEFENDING CLAY AIKEN'S MASCULINITY SINCE 2003

> Fans of the former *American Idol* runner-up have been dismissed as a delusional cult of lonely, middle-aged hausfraus, but critics who utter an unkind word about the crooner are routinely deluged with angry letters. In 2005 and 2006, Claymates harassed both Rush Limbaugh and Tucker Carlson into apologizing for insulting their hero. The live ammo, however, is reserved for those who insinuate that their beloved Clay is anything less than a strapping hetero: When a former Green Beret dished about the sex he'd allegedly had with Aiken, the ex-soldier was bombarded with death threats frightening enough to lead him to call the FBI.

Justify your love: "Many of Clay's fans are older women, and they react the way a mother would if her child was being picked on," says Becky Kolacki, an 18-year-old college student who runs a Clay Aiken fan site.

SEND IN THE CLOWNS

JUGGALOS

MAKEUP. SODA. MACHETES?

> Becoming a Juggalo is more a lifestyle choice than a musical one. Followers of the suburban-Detroit shock-rap duo Insane Clown Posse share their heroes' passion for ghoulish clown makeup, backyard wrestling and the cheap Faygo soda they're showered with at ICP concerts. Sometimes their passion gets the best of them: After the duo's single failed to enter MTV's rotation in 2000, irate Juggalos stormed the *Total Request Live* studios and had to be forcibly removed by the NYPD; and in June 2006, a handful of machete-wielding ICP fans went on a violent robbing spree in a Washington State park, shouting, "Woo, woo, Juggalo!"

Justify your love: "Kids find it an outlet for all the pent-up stuff going on in their heads," says Michael Sorg, a 25-year-old video editor who runs a Juggalos fan site. "Whether you're anti-establishment or your life just sucks, it fits."

LIFE'S A BEACH

PARROTHEADS

OPENING HEARTS—AND WALLETS—IN SEARCH OF THE PROMISED LAND

> Obsessive fandom is frequently the domain of lonely malcontents. But Parrotheads often have the trappings of a normal life—staid office job, nice family, hefty mortgage—yet long for escape into that mythical land of hammocks and perpetual sunshine known as Margaritaville. What Jimmy Buffett's fans may lack in dysfunction, they make up for in buying power: They've propelled Buffett's four books onto the *New York Times* bestseller list and enthusiastically patronized a chain of Margaritaville cafes. There are about 200 officially recognized Parrothead clubs nationwide, whose members meet regularly, dressed in Hawaiian shirts, downing overpriced frozen drinks and talking about the day they'll finally relocate to Key West.

Justify your love: "In this fast-paced rat race, we need a means to slow down," says Chris Wilson, a 32-year-old physician who is part of a Web site called the Church of Buffett, Orthodox. "Jimmy's music is the vehicle for many people to maintain their sanity."

VIOLENTLY HAPPY

BJÖRKIES

STALKING, SUICIDE AND VIGILANTISM

> Diehard fans of the elfin Icelandic singer have displayed both impressive dedication and outright insanity. In 2003, after a con artist sold fake concert tickets to 400 fans for a San Diego club date, the Björkies launched their own investigation, tracking the scammer to Hawaii, where he was arrested. An impressed San Diego vice detective said the Björkies' communications system "rivals the CIA's." Two earlier incidents were far more troubling. In 1998, a stalker broke into Björk's mother's house; two years before that, crazed Björkie Ricardo Lopez, incensed over the singer's breakup with Goldie, videotaped himself mailing her a letter bomb filled with acid and then shooting himself.

Justify your love: "Björk is captivating beyond words," says Mark Burbey, a fortysomething writer-producer who runs a Björk blog. "She's cute, sexy, fun and wildly intelligent."

PREVIOUS PAGE: TED SOQUI/CORBIS; THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: WILL + DENI MCINTYRE/CORBIS; JAMES D. DECAMP/COLUMBUS DISPATCH/AP PHOTO; REX USA; INSETS, FROM LEFT: GREGG DEGUIRE/WIREIMAGE.COM; JUNKO KIMURA/GETTY IMAGES.

Kiss Army: Rocking and rolling all night, pretty much just sitting around all day.

TONGUE GUNS

KISS ARMY

STILL CRAZY, CRAZY, CRAZY AFTER ALL THESE YEARS

> Members of the Kiss Army find it easy to build their entire lives around the band, as their idols stamp their likeness on everything from bowling balls to condoms to caskets. Over the years, the aging Army has shown impressive brand loyalty, traveling the world to attend Kiss conventions and successive "final" tours. And when the 1997 book *Kiss & Tell* claimed that Ace Frehley was an incorrigible drug addict—and asshole—the Army declared war on the author, sending him hate mail and threatening to kill him. In 2006, several hundred Kiss Army soldiers descended on the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum to protest the organization's continued snub of their masked marvels.

Justify your love: "They helped make my life fun," says Kim Rolfe, a 40-ish structural designer who helped organize the Hall of Fame rally. "They did exactly what the critics told them they could not do."

Mariah Carey waves to a passing unicorn.

Deicide solution: Italian fan Andrea Volpe in court in 2006.

THE MOST DEMENTED FANS EVER!

WILL *NOT* BE SILENCED

LAMBS

MARIAH CAREY'S DEVOTEES EVEN LIKED *GLITTER*

> Mariah's Lambs are more than just devoted fans—they're a support group she counts on to ride out the valleys in her roller-coaster career. Carey recently admitted to getting through the tough times by poring over the elaborate scrapbooks that fans have sent her, and the Lambs also organize campaigns to undermine her pop rival Madonna. They stuck with her even after her disastrous 2001 biopic, *Glitter*, and in 2006 launched "The Glitter Project," a plan to buy multiple copies of the accompanying album and shoot the commercial dud to the top of the charts on Mariah's birthday, five years after its release. (They failed.)

Justify your love: "Mariah knows how to touch people through her music," says Tahiana D'Egmont, a 21-year-old marketing coordinator who runs a fan site. "After she touches you like that, it's impossible not to form an attachment to her."

NEOHIPPIE HEAVEN

PHISHHEADS

UNWASHED MASSES WHO FOLLOWED PHISH INTO THE VOID ... AND GOT LEFT THERE

> Like the Grateful Dead before them, Phish inspired thousands to forsake careers, stable relationships, drug laws and soap to build their lives around their heroes' tours. Extreme even by the standards of migratory jam-band followers, Phish fans regularly traveled to remote locales like Plattsburgh, New York, and Limestone, Maine, for extravagant multi-day concerts. After Phish called it quits following their 2004 summer tour, angry Phishheads turned on their leader, swamping frontman Trey Anastasio with hate mail, spraying graffiti on a theater where he was performing solo and pelting him with beer during one acoustic set.

Justify your love: "While this analogy gets overused, this was a breakup," says David Steinberg, a veteran of 232 Phish shows. "No one was wrong, but something that made life better was going away."

NONE MORE BLACK

DEICIDERS

VANDALISM, RIOTS, ARSON AND MURDER

> Black-metal fans are a famously antisocial lot to begin with, but followers of the Satan-upping Floridians Deicide have taken bad behavior to a new extreme. Earlier this year, Deicide was banned from a French festival after fans scribbled one of their song titles ("When Satan Rules His World") on a tombstone in Brittany. In 2005, Chilean special forces had to be called in when fans rioted after being shut out of the band's show in Santiago. But that was mild compared to the teenage Deicide devotees in Florida who, in 1996, set fire to a Baptist church—then murdered a teacher who caught them trying to hurl a can of peaches through a school window. Or the Chilean Deicide fan who in 2004 slit a priest's throat in full view of his congregation before stabbing himself. Or Italian Deicide diehards the Beasts of Satan—led by 28-year-old Andrea Volpe—who brutally murdered two other teens in a satanic ritual in 1998 and then urinated on their graves.

Justify your love: Howard Hubbard, 31, a concert promoter and bar owner who runs Deicide's Web site, insists the band is just a scapegoat: "No one wants to believe their son is actually messed up enough to commit a terrible crime, so parents look for someone to blame."

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: CHRIS CURRY/*PEORIA JOURNAL STAR*/AP PHOTO; CLEMENTE MARMORINO/AP PHOTO; DAVID BERGMAN/CORBIS; INSET: JOHN MCMURTRIE/RETNA UK.

GUEST LIST

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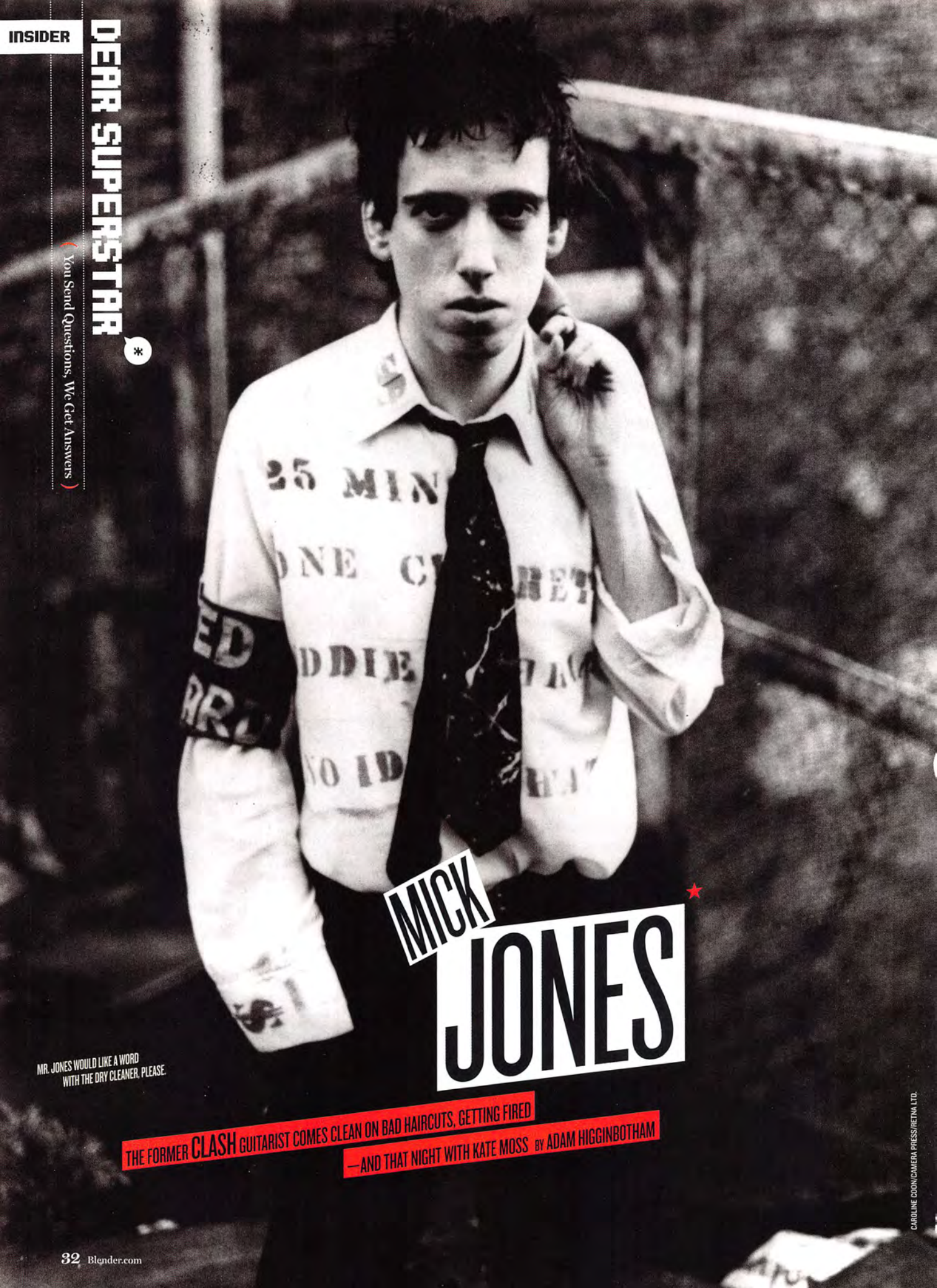

MICK JONES ★

MR. JONES WOULD LIKE A WORD WITH THE DRY CLEANER, PLEASE.

THE FORMER CLASH GUITARIST COMES CLEAN ON BAD HAIRCUTS, GETTING FIRED —AND THAT NIGHT WITH KATE MOSS BY ADAM HIGGINBOTHAM

CAROLINE COON/CAMERA PRESS/RETNA LTD.

Mick Jones in New York, October 2006.

PHOTOGRAPH BY TERRY RICHARDSON

"IT'S STRANGE TO have a museum exhibit organized around you while you're still alive," says Mick Jones, sipping his third or fourth beer of the afternoon in a Lower East Side restaurant.

At 51, the neatly suited former Clash guitarist has just returned from Cleveland, where he opened a Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum exhibit devoted to his old band, an installation that includes everything from Paul Simonon's smashed bass from the cover of London Calling to the band's old stage outfits: "Shoes, socks ... underpants," Jones explains, sardonically. It's now almost 30 years since Jones—with Simonon, frontman Joe Strummer and drummer Terry Chimes—formed the Clash and, alongside the Sex Pistols, made up the front line of U.K. punk.

While the unexpected death of Strummer in 2002 makes the long-rumored re-formation of the Clash impossible, the memorializing of the band continues: Their 19 singles have been repackaged in a new box set. And director Julian Temple has just completed a Strummer documentary.

Nowadays, Jones is nearly as well known for his role as producer/father figure to Kate Moss boy toy and deathwatch fixture Pete Doherty as for his membership in what Strummer called "the only band that matters." When not producing, or dabbling in Carbon/Silicon—the new band Jones has formed with longtime friend Tony James of Generation X—he is a bit of a homebody, helping to raise three kids with his second wife, Miranda, and scouring thrift stores for pop-culture collectibles.

Even so, as he prepares to answer your questions, Jones's punk roots still show: "Dear Superstar?" he asks skeptically. "I'm not sure I qualify for that ..." >>

WHAT WAS THE FIRST SONG YOU LEARNED ON THE GUITAR?

dodg000, Cary, NC

That was "Spoonful"—Willie Dixon. It's very simple. I was about 15. I was quite a late starter, but I was procrastinating for a few years before that. My first instrument was a Stylophone—a little hand organ played with a pen that you hear on David Bowie's "Space Oddity." Then I played drums. After that I took up the bass, and then thought, I can handle a couple of more strings here—and settled for playing guitar.

WHAT DO PEOPLE GET WRONG ABOUT SID VICIOUS?

hoguem, Bowling Green, OH

He was a much smarter guy than most people think. He was a great stylist, as well—when I first met him, he had a skinhead haircut, wraparound sunglasses, an ankle-length rubber raincoat, no socks and brothel-creepers. He looked fantastic. A smart guy—but he got messed up.

WHAT WAS THE DRUG OF CHOICE IN THE CLASH?

jimmyjazz, Marietta, GA

Weed and beer. And cigarettes. A bit of speed at the start, as well. But we couldn't take the comedown—it was too depressing. But it was cheap and easily available, so punks did take it quite a lot. Nothing too much. Although "nothing too much" can be ... as much as you like.

WHAT'S THE WORST HAIRCUT YOU'VE EVER HAD?

kalaresa007, Akron, OH

I've had so many worst haircuts—I started as a young guy in Carnaby Street at the end of the swinging '60s, and I followed the fashions for a long time. I think the poodle cut probably did me the most disservice. That was in '78. That was a pretty important year for me, but I had a bad haircut. I was going against the punk police, and I grew my hair: It was all ringlets. I looked a bit T. Rex.

FROM LEFT: THE CLASH BACKSTAGE DURING A 17-NIGHT RUN IN NYC, 1981; TUNING UP DURING THE EARLY, SHAGGY YEARS.

PAUL SIMONON WAS FAMOUS FOR HIS PRACTICAL JOKES. IS THERE ONE IN PARTICULAR YOU REMEMBER?

strumthis1707, Hopewell, NJ

He used to set light to journalists. I'd be doing a serious interview, and he and Topper [Headon] would come up behind them and set light to a bit of paper under where they were sitting. For a laugh.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE CLASH LYRIC?

wakkagal, Pasadena, TX

I like the asides—like "Vacuum cleaner sucks up budgie" and "He who fucks nuns ... " I like "El Clash Combo ... weddings, parties, anything!" on "Revolution Rock," at the end. Joe was always like that—he did it live. He used to go off and chat during the songs, just a stream of unconsciousness. It was great, like old jazz or rock & roll. It's really hard to do. Those things just came out.

WHY IS "TRAIN IN VAIN" CALLED THAT—AND WHO WAS IT ABOUT?

molsoneto, Altoona, PA

It's a bit like [Robert Johnson's] "Love in Vain"—that's why the song is called that. And we didn't want to call it "Stand by Me," did we? It was only an afterthought, anyway, just something we knocked out at the last minute. It's funny how that turned out to be such a big song, that helped introduce us. It took something like a half-hour to write and a half-hour to record.

IN THE DOCUMENTARY WESTWAY TO THE WORLD, JOE STRUMMER COMPARES YOU TO "ELIZABETH TAYLOR IN A FILTHY MOOD." IS THAT YOU?

mannatease, Uvalde, TX

I can see what he's saying, but I just thought that was natural because my mum models herself on Elizabeth Taylor. It means that I'm a bit of a diva? I don't know about that. Someone who's very passionate about what they do, a lot of the time ... when they say, "Ooh, he's very difficult," that means you just care about it. >>

★ "'TRAIN IN VAIN' TOOK A HALF-HOUR TO WRITE AND A HALF-HOUR TO RECORD."

PENNIE SMITH (3).

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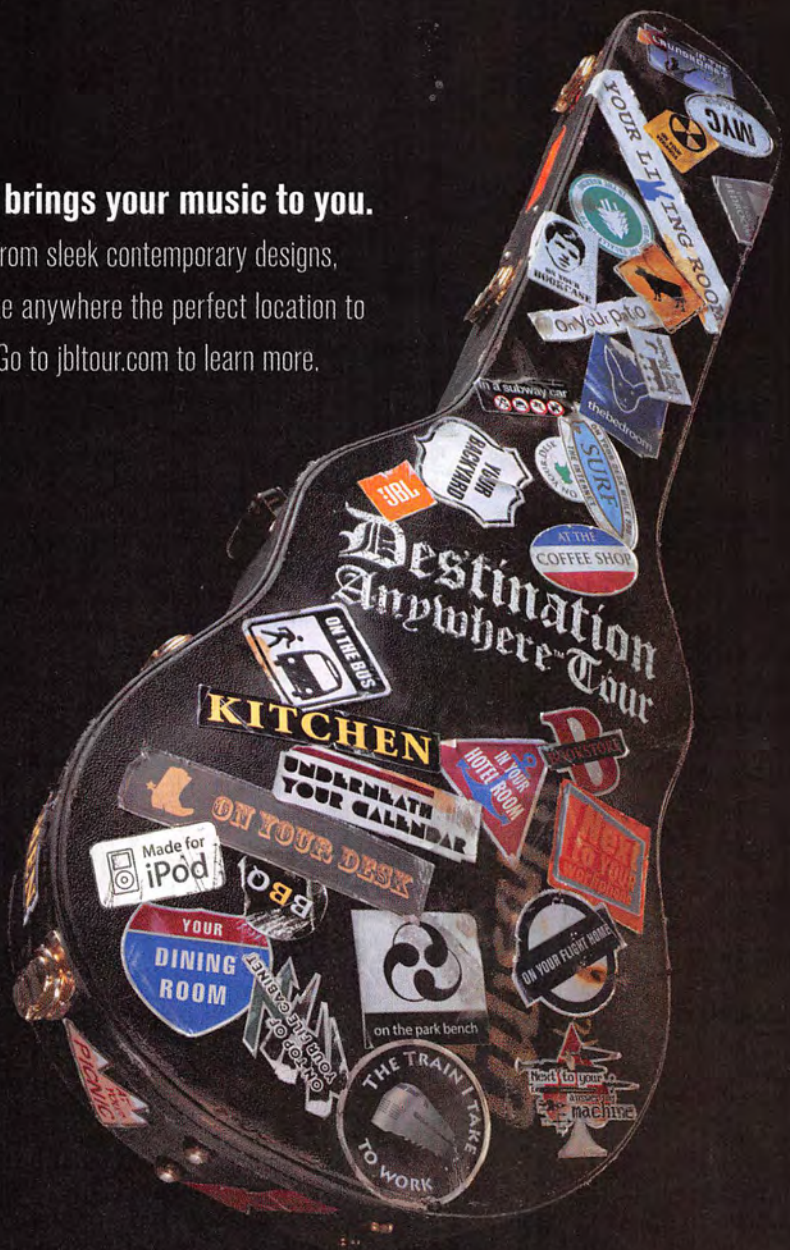

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MICK JONES

JONES IN JAPAN, BEFORE THE RUSH HOUR COMMUTE

"ROCK THE CASBAH" WAS THE FIRST SONG PLAYED ON ALLIED FORCES RADIO AFTER THE INVASION OF KUWAIT. DO PEOPLE OFTEN MISUNDERSTAND WHAT IT'S ABOUT?

jax812, Emporia, VA

Totally—and that was really upsetting for us. When we saw it put on the side of a U.S. bomb—ROCK THE CASBAH—Joe was in tears. We hated that appropriation. We never meant anything like that.

WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER MOST ABOUT THE 1983 MEETING WHERE YOU WERE KICKED OUT OF THE BAND?

rem206, Gadsden, AL

That was a big day. It was one of the very rare occasions when I was first to arrive. Usually I'm late—so I thought, Sod this. And I went to the bookshop up the road. When I came back, everybody was there and there was a terrible atmosphere—but by that time, we'd got so fed up with each other, our communication level was pretty much down to grunting at the floor. They dropped the bombshell, and I was outraged, packed my guitar and stormed out—"All right! If that's the way you want it! See you later!" I was in a state of shock that lasted for months. I put Michael Caine glasses on, dyed my hair blond and grew a beard for a bit. We all lived in the same area, and I didn't want to see people, so I was trying to be in disguise.

WHAT WAS IT ABOUT THE LIBERTINES THAT MADE YOU WANT TO PRODUCE THEM?

rwalsh, Tazewell, TN

When I first met them, Pete Doherty came into the rehearsal room on a scooter—straight from the liquor store, with a couple of bags of takeaway beer and drinks hanging from the handlebars. I knew straightaway I'd like these guys. They must have thought I was a lazy bastard when I was doing the record, because for the first two weeks I didn't do nothing. I gawped through the control-room window going, "Uh ... how am I going to do this?" And then I figured it out—just to do it live, and try to catch a moment.

YOU WERE IN THE ROOM THE NIGHT KATE MOSS WAS PHOTOGRAPHED DOING COCAINE. HOW DID YOU FIRST HEAR THAT THE STORY HAD BROKEN?

vmica27202, Lewiston, MT

I saw it in the paper when it came out. I thought, My God—this has just happened on my watch. It was awful. It wasn't nice. Mad stuff—and it also took over the record; people looked at the record differently—over there, anyway. It wasn't about the music anymore.

WHAT DO YOU THINK CAN BE DONE TO HELP PETE DOHERTY?

KeyStoneKop102, State College, PA

I don't know—he's doing all right at the moment. But I don't think you can tell anybody anything. You've got to go through it yourself and figure it out. I did try a little—one always tries, you know. You care about people and you try to offer good advice.

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU WERE MISTAKEN FOR MICK JONES FROM FOREIGNER?

flogmol202, Bishop, CA

I've had a few letters. I once wrote a letter to the *The Times*, and they publish your address. After that I started getting letters from fans, and one of them mistakenly sent me a picture of the other Mick Jones to autograph. But he's not the only other famous Mick Jones—there's Mick Jones the footballer, who played for Leeds United in the '60s, and also Mick Jones who was the guitarist of [Welsh rock band] Man. I've never met him, but I've always wanted to.

WHAT'S THE LAST THING YOU SAID TO JOE STRUMMER?

Lenagrin, Oceanside, CA

"Good-bye." I went down the steps, he went up the steps, and he said, "Take care." It was in [London celebrity hangout] the Groucho Club. I wasn't expecting to see him there that night. I went there for something else and saw Keith Allen, a friend of his, and he said, "Joe's here." And it was great. We got together, and we had a really great evening drinking and talking, just by pure chance. That was on Friday, and he died on Sunday.

DID THE CLASH TURN DOWN $20 MILLION TO RE-FORM?

Wigoffim78, Seattle

Twenty million lire, that should be—or baht. Even when we were still going, we could never agree on anything. And after, we became friends again, but it was never right. Or someone didn't want to do it. Once, we were talking about it, and Joe went, "Well ... perhaps we shouldn't bother." And I went, "All right"—and we left it at that. Maybe that was the way it was supposed to be, and people will remember us fondly because of it. Although I'm sure we could have made another record, and it would have been just as good. We were just still developing musically, even at the end. I would've liked to have done more; *Combat Rock* could have been a quadruple album. [BLENDER]

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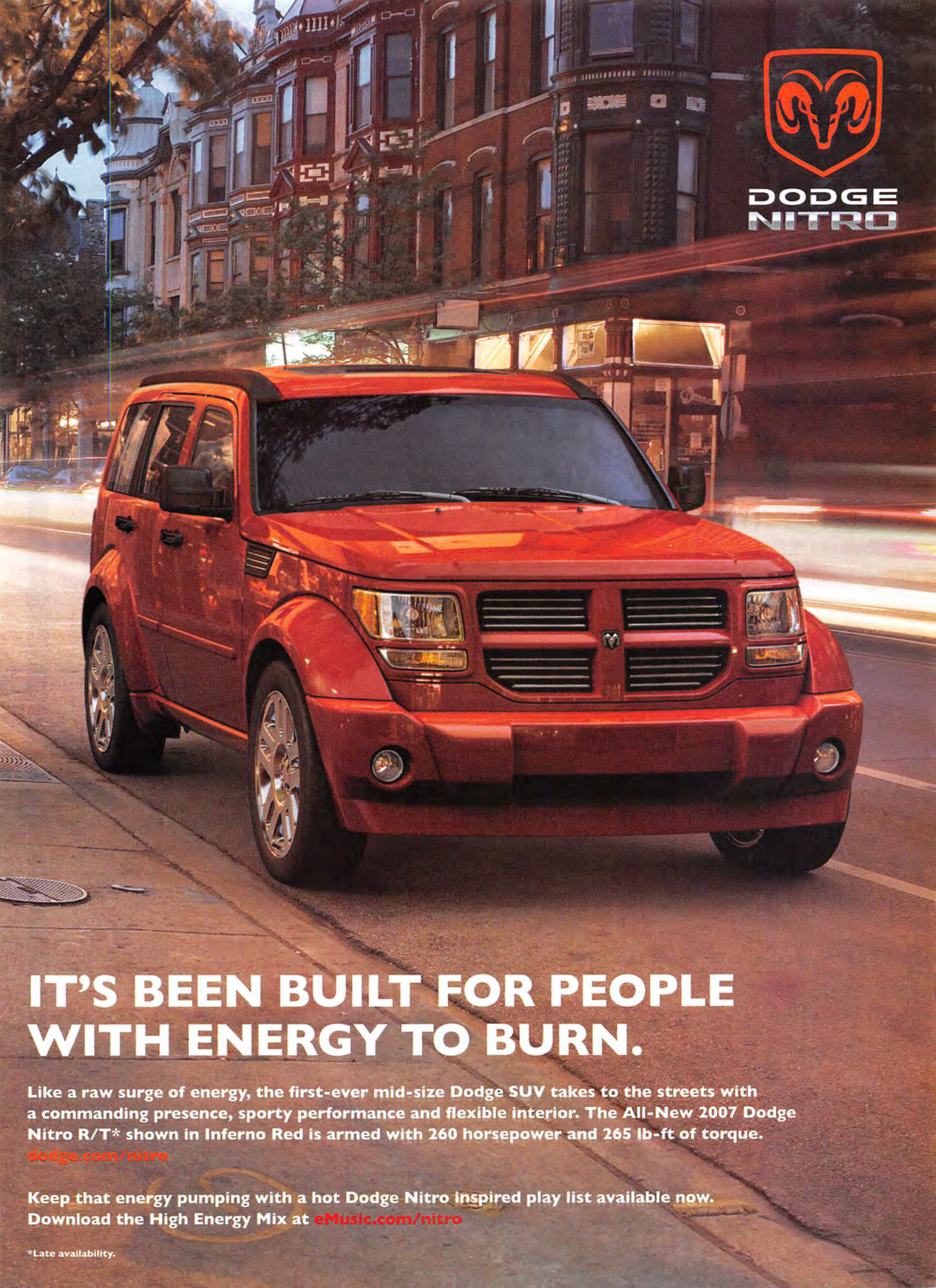
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OASIS

"Live Forever"

MICK JAGGER WAS AN OVERRATED BLOWHARD. KURT COBAIN WAS A RICH WHINER. OR SO THOUGHT AN UNKNOWN MANCUNIAN NAMED NOEL GALLAGHER (By Greg Milner)

> "IT'S A SONG of pride, it's a song about youth, it's a song about knowing who you are," Noel Gallagher says of "Live Forever." Strange, then, that one of rock's most enduring optimistic anthems was inspired by music Gallagher hated.

12 YEARS AGO JANUARY 1995 THIS MONTH

One night in 1991, the future Britpop maven was sitting in his Manchester flat, strumming an acoustic guitar and listening to the Rolling Stones' *Exile on Main Street*. He was thinking about how much he loathed this so-called classic when he noticed that at one point Mick Jagger's vocals sounded great over the guitar pattern Gallagher had been playing all evening. "It was the bit from 'Shine a Light' that goes [sings], 'May the good lord shine a light on you,'" he recalls. Gallagher kept the melody and replaced the line with one of his own: "Maybe I don't really want to know ... "

For a while, that's all he had. He was spending his days toiling for a building company contracted to British Gas. After a piece of pipe smashed his foot, though, Gallagher was put in charge of a storeroom, and it gave him plenty of time to write his first songs. The fourth, which grew out of the nicked Stones tune, was "Live Forever."

Gallagher had read an interview with Kurt Cobain in which the Nirvana frontman mentioned his self-parodying song "I Hate Myself and Want to Die." "It struck me that this fucker, an extremely talented guy, had everything I wanted," Gallagher tells *Blender*. "He was rich, he was famous, he was in the greatest rock & roll band of its time—and he's writing songs saying he hates himself and wants to die! My way of thinking was, Well, I fuckin' love myself, and I'm gonna live forever, man!"

"Live Forever" was as basic as "Louie Louie." It had no verses or chorus except for the falsetto refrain, and the melody encompassed just a few notes, as simple as a soccer chant. But this simplicity reinforced the song's themes of youthful promise and unalloyed friendship. The verseless, chorus-less structure meant the song never resolved. It really did seem like "Live Forever" lived forever.

Noel played the song for his younger brother, Liam, who sang lead for a local band called Oasis. Duly impressed, Liam and the band invited the elder Gallagher to join and assume songwriting duties. And the song convinced Alan McGhee, who ran the British record label Creation, that Oasis could be the biggest band in the world. McGhee was on vacation in Hawaii when he first heard the tune. "It was probably the single greatest moment I've ever experienced with them," he said.

After two modestly received singles from Oasis's debut album, *Definitely Maybe*, "Live Forever" was the song that got the world's attention. In the U.K., it marked the dawn of Britpop, paving the way for the likes of Blur and Travis. In the U.S., where Britpop was more a novelty than a movement, the success of "Live Forever" represented a subtle change in the musical firmament. It was Gallagher's reaction to "I Hate Myself" writ large, as rock's pendulum swung away from grunge's realism back toward pop escapism. As Gallagher puts it, "I don't need to turn on the radio and hear some heroin-addicted multimillionaire rock star telling me life is shit. I know life is shit." [BLENDER]

The Gallagher brothers: "Let's make these things head-butt!"

MICHAEL SPENCER JONES

Vital Statistics

Song "Live Forever"
Artist Oasis
Label Creation/Epic
Performers Liam Gallagher, *vocals*; Noel Gallagher, *lead guitar*; Paul "Guigsy" McGuigan, *bass*; Paul "Bonehead" Arthurs, *guitar*; Tony McCarroll, *drums*
Writer Noel Gallagher
Producers Owen Morris, Mark Coyle, Oasis
Chart debut January 14, 1995
Highest chart position 39

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SANYO

Now that Eddie Van Halen's son has joined Van Halen, are they the first father-son combo ever to play in the same band?

Brent Sims, Amherst, Massachusetts

Not quite. Although the appointment of 15-year-old Wolfgang "Wolfie" Van Halen as bass player is undoubtedly cute, it's already been done.

Gospel star Pops Staples used to perform with his son Pervis in an early incarnation of the Staple Singers. Master P and his shorty, Lil' Romeo, became the Ken Griffey Sr. and Jr. of hip-hop when they rapped together on a 2001 album. Reggae scion Ziggy Marley appeared on one of dad Bob's later recordings; Rufus Wainwright has shared a stage with both of his folkie parents; and Hank Williams III cut an album with his dad *and* his grandpa (although the latter appeared posthumously).

Personally, we can't wait until, oh, about 2025, and what promises to be the greatest father-son bill of all time: Ladies and gentlemen, we present Kevin and Sean Preston Federline.

Does STING really have a type of insect named after him?

Frances Ogbayeki, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

No, although that would be appropriate. It's actually a Colombian tree frog, also known as *Hyla stingi*. Researchers named the amphibian in 1994, in honor of Sting's ongoing efforts to save the rain forest. No word on whether it also plays the lute.

Kermit feels ... violated.

The erstwhile Gordon Sumner isn't the only rock star with a counterpart in the animal kingdom. Simon & Garfunkel, Miles Davis, the Ramones and the Sex Pistols have all lent their names to specimens of trilobites, a group of 500-million-year-old arthropods. More colorful examples include an East African crustacean, *Cirolana mercuryi*, named after Tanzanian-born Freddie Mercury; a parasitic wasp named after Metallica; the *Greeffiella beatlei*, a roundworm whose shagginess reminded discoverers of the Beatles' moptops; and the Elvisaurus, named for its "pompadour-like" crest.

But no star can top Frank Zappa. The eclectic rocker's many namesakes include a species of goby, an orb-weaver spider (whose abdominal markings resemble Zappa's mustache), a jellyfish (christened by an Italian marine biologist as part of a scheme to meet Zappa) and a prehistoric mollusk. He even has an asteroid named after him—Zappafrank—not to be confused with his daughter, Moon Unit.

Did Charlie Watts, the Rolling Stones drummer, really once beat the crap out of Mick Jagger?

Dominic Roth, Lincoln, Nebraska

Delightfully, yes. It happened in October 1984. The Stones had gathered in Amsterdam to discuss their next album and tour; Jagger, though, was more concerned with his solo career and was acting like a bit of a bastard. One night Keith Richards took Jagger out for some carousing—and by the time they stumbled back to their hotel at five in the morning, the singer was absolutely plastered. He called up to Watts, fast asleep in his own room, and started shouting into the phone. "Izzat my drummer, then? Where's my fucking drummer?"

What happened next is one of the most remarkable moments in Stones history. The mild-mannered Watts, always the quiet one of the group, crawled out of bed. He shaved, put on a crisp white shirt and impeccably tailored suit, knotted his tie and slipped on some shoes. Then he calmly walked downstairs, opened the door, grabbed Jagger—and cold-cocked him right in the kisser. "Don't ever call me your drummer again," Watts sneered. "You're my fucking singer."

It must have been quite a scene. "Charlie punched him into a plateful of smoked salmon," Richards recalled in a 1989 *Playboy* magazine interview. "Mick almost floated out the window into a canal. I grabbed his leg and saved him."

Jagger has tried to play down the incident: "He pushed me, but I don't think he actually punched me." But Watts, while discreet, has implicitly confirmed it. "It's not something I'm proud of," he said in 1997. "I was really pissed off."

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How come Pete Doherty never spends any time in jail?

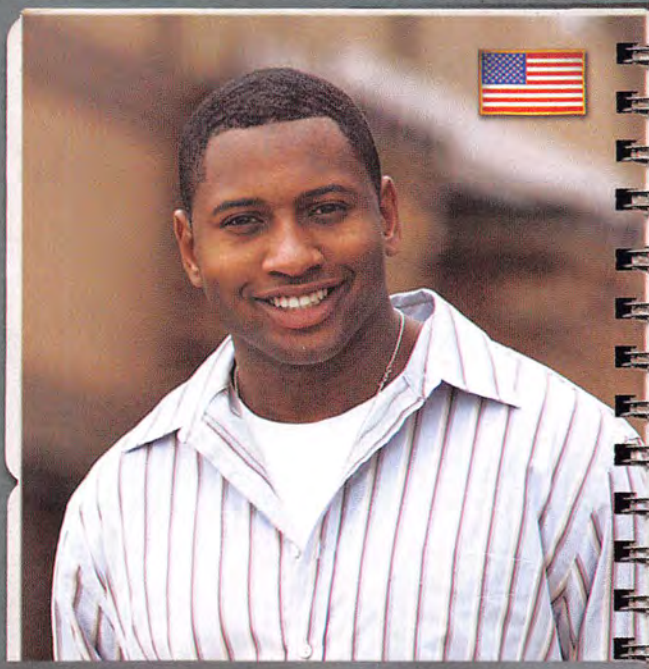
Meredith McCain, Aurora, Colorado

First of all, according to Samantha Cohen, a London barrister, the rocker "is not being treated differently than anyone else in the English system. It's not a question of celebrity at all." The problem, Cohen says, is that, as in the U.S., "English prisons are absolutely packed to the gills." To combat overcrowding, the British Court of Appeal has ruled that judges should avoid sentencing drug offenders unless absolutely necessary. According to Cohen, "simple possession of class A drugs"—a category that includes heroin, cocaine, speed and Ecstasy—"is treated as more of a social problem than a serious criminal problem." The focus is on rehabilitation rather than punishment, and since Doherty is taking steps to get clean—voluntarily entering rehab, getting an anti-opiate implant—the court, Cohen says, "is running with it."

Doherty isn't out of the woods just yet. "If, for instance, he checks himself out of the clinic he's been going to, then he could be arrested for breaching the terms of his order," Cohen says. [BLENDER]

Doherty: "This new Gillette Mach 8 sucks."

FROG: DAVID AUBREY/SCIENCE PHOTO LIBRARY. STING: MILES COPELAND/LFI. DOHERTY: HUMPHREY NEMAR/EXPRESS UK/ZUMA PRESS



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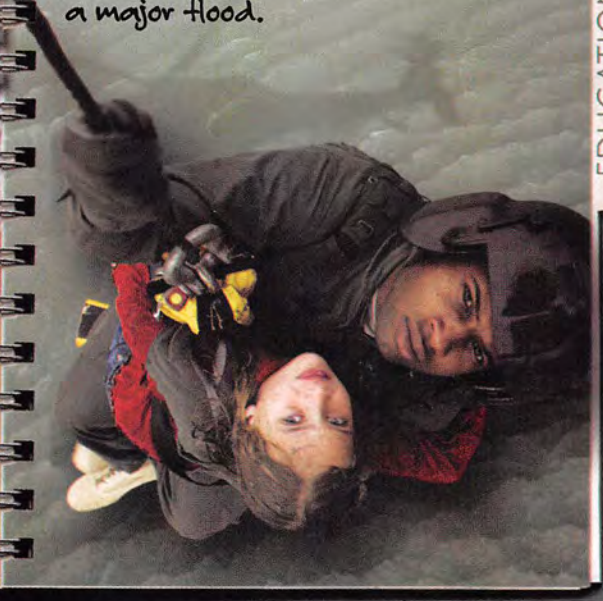
The Guard provides 100% tuition as well as the Montgomery G.I. Bill, which helps cover expenses like books and housing. That's on top of an enlistment bonus of up to $20,000.

But my biggest reward in the Guard comes from putting other people first, like the time I helped my community during a major flood.

EDUCATION



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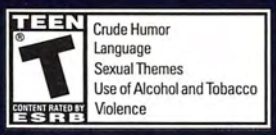

PlayStation 2

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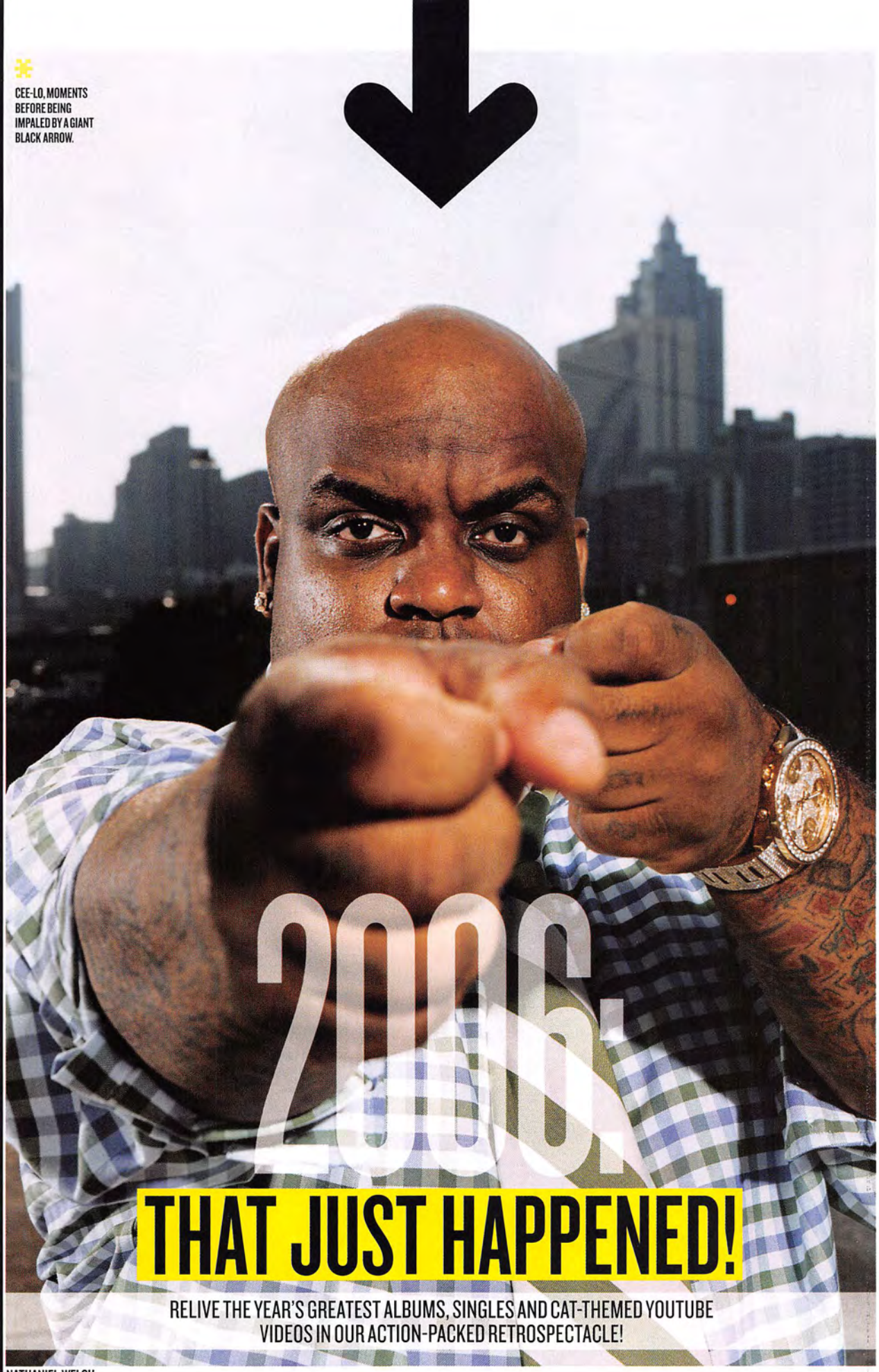
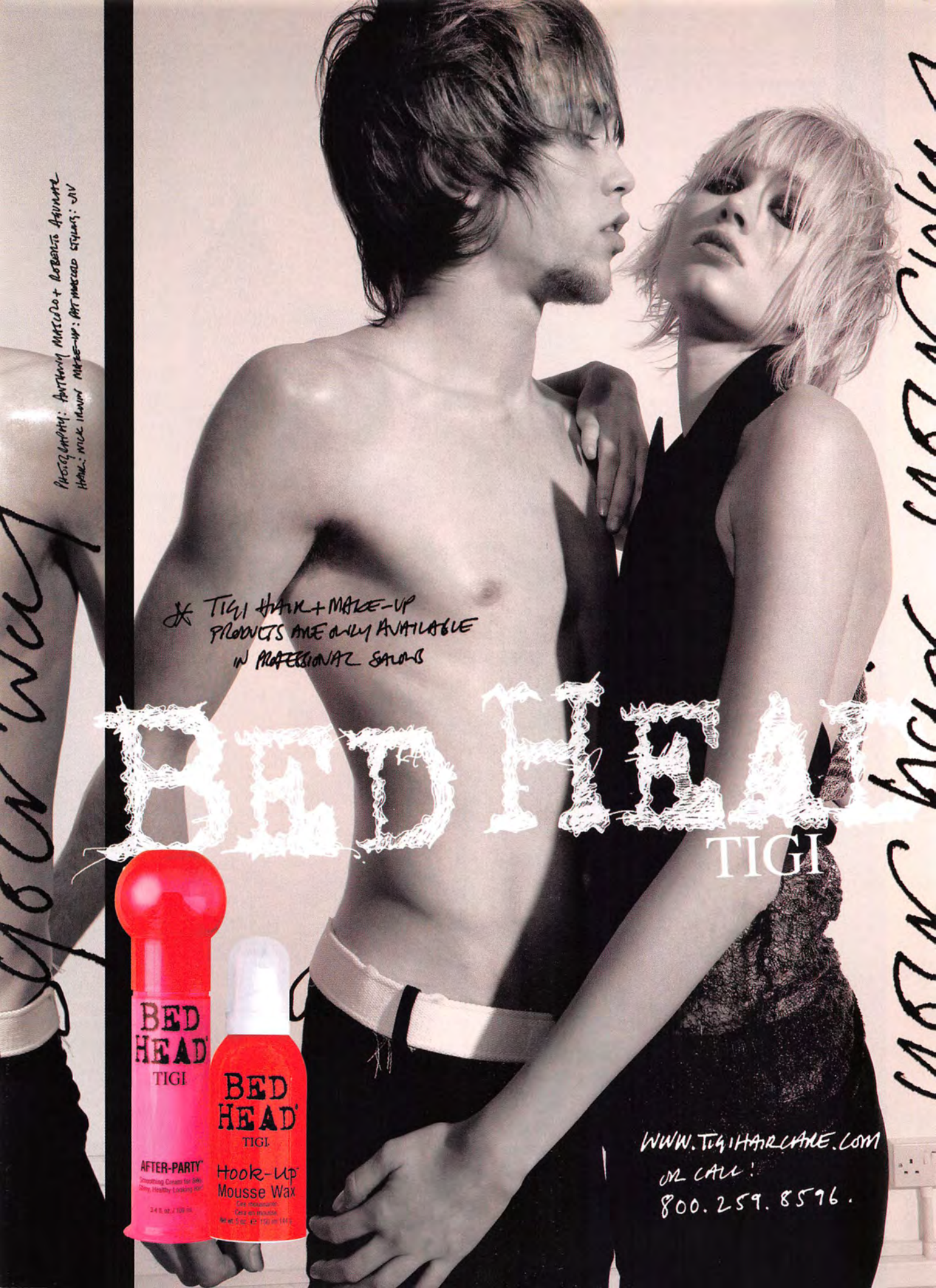


CEE-LO, MOMENTS BEFORE BEING IMPALED BY A GIANT BLACK ARROW.

2006: THAT JUST HAPPENED!

RELIVE THE YEAR'S GREATEST ALBUMS, SINGLES AND CAT-THEMED YOUTUBE VIDEOS IN OUR ACTION-PACKED RETROSPECTACLE!

NATHANIEL WELCH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THE 2006 NOISEMAKER AWARDS

WE HAD SOME GOOD TIMES THIS YEAR, DIDN'T WE? WE LAUGHED, WE CRIED, WE LOOKED AT SILLY THINGS ON THE INTERNET ... RELIVE IT ALL IN OUR ANNUAL READERS' POLL, FEATURING THE YEAR'S MOST GLORIOUS AND SHAMEFUL STARS

SIMON EMMETT

1
ALBUM OF THE YEAR

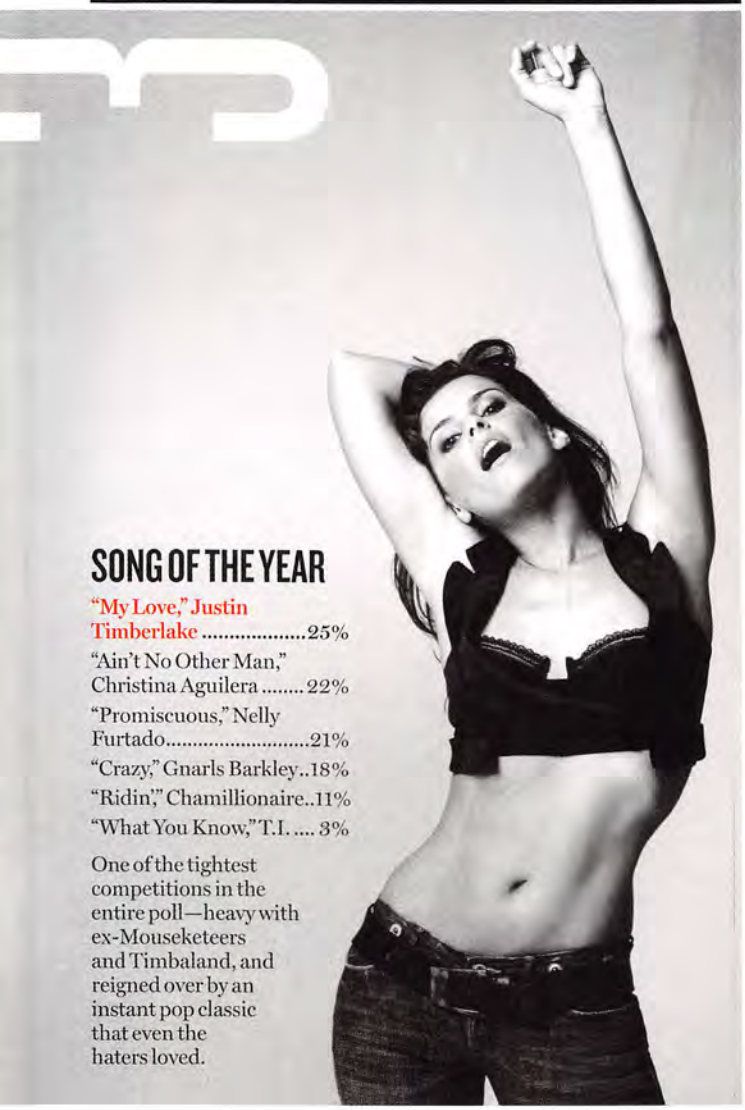
My Chemical Romance, *The Black Parade* 36%
Justin Timberlake, *FutureSex/LoveSounds* 33%
Red Hot Chili Peppers, *Stadium Arcadium* 13%
Bob Dylan, *Modern Times* 7%
Gnarls Barkley, *St. Elsewhere* 6%
The Killers, *Sam's Town* 5%

Who knew Queen-inflected concept records about cancer patients would be all the rage? But you can't please everyone. And you certainly can't please Josh Murphy of Bakersfield, California, who says simply, "These choices are dog shit; where's Hinder?"

2
NEW ARTIST OF THE YEAR

Gnarls Barkley 36%
Chamillionaire 18%
Ne-Yo 17%
Arctic Monkeys 14%
Lady Sovereign 9%
Kevin Federline 6%

Hey, K-Fed, don't quit your day ... oh ... right.



SONG OF THE YEAR

"My Love," Justin Timberlake 25%
"Ain't No Other Man," Christina Aguilera 22%
"Promiscuous," Nelly Furtado 21%
"Crazy," Gnarls Barkley .. 18%
"Ridin'," Chamillionaire .. 11%
"What You Know," T.I. 3%

One of the tightest competitions in the entire poll—heavy with ex-Mouseketeers and Timbaland, and reigned over by an instant pop classic that even the haters loved.

4
TRAIN WRECK OF THE YEAR

Lindsay Lohan
35%

Paris Hilton
27%

Kate Moss
12%

Pete Doherty
11%

George Michael
10%

Axl Rose
5%

Fortunately, that new and improved Primatene Mist should get Lindsay's production-halting problem asthma under control, so we don't expect to see her in this category next year.

5
HERO(ES) OF THE YEAR

Filthy-rich YouTube founders 32%
Borat 23%
Gerard Way 15%
Amy Lee 13%
Flavor Flav 9%
Timbaland 8%

Once again, society proves its obsession with material wealth by narrowly selecting newly minted kajillionaires over, well, a guy who doesn't actually exist. Either that or you're showing your gratitude to the folks who made it possible for you to spend your day watching monkeys bathe cats instead of, you know, working.

GNARLS BARKLEY: ROBERT TRACHTENBERG/CORBIS OUTLINE; LOHAN: FRIOLO/FLORES/SPLASH NEWS; HILTON: ROC/FAME PICTURES; MOSS: BARM/FAME PICTURES; DOHERTY: BARM/FAME PICTURES; MICHAEL: RAMEY PHOTO; YOUTUBE FOUNDERS: CHRIS STEWART/*SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE*/CORBIS; FURTADO: MICHAEL WILLIAMS.

6

MOVIE WE'LL STILL BE QUOTING IN 2026

Borat 38%

Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest 30%

Talladega Nights 23%

The Departed 6%

Marie Antoinette 3%

Although, if everyone could hold off until 2025 to start, that'd be great. Thanks.

Sacha Baron Cohen rejoices upon learning he doesn't have to do this shtick for a while.

7

COUPLE OF THE YEAR

Pam Anderson and Kid Rock
45%

James Blunt and Petra Nemcova
29%

Eddie Murphy and Scary Spice
22%

Da Brat and David Gest
4%

Everyone loves a happy ending, so the sudden reunion and certain-not-to-fail marriage of the Anderson-Rocks melted even the hardest of hearts. Note the lukewarm reaction to the surprise tandem of Murphy and Scary, a union which may or may not disprove the onetime funnyman's long-rumored tranny fixation.

BORAT: SIMON EMMETT; ROCK AND ANDERSON: ERIC ESTRADE/AFP/GETTY IMAGES; BLUNT AND NEMCOVA: INFGOFF.COM; SPICE: FERDAUS SHAMIM/WIREIMAGE.COM; MURPHY: MALCOLM ALI/WIREIMAGE.COM; DA BRAT AND GEST: X17AGENCY.COM.

8

CROTCH SLIP OF THE YEAR

Lindsay Lohan.....43%

Paris Hilton..... 28%

Ashlee Simpson 23%

Pete Wentz.....6%

Disclaimer: *Blender* in no way condones the voyeuristic, underhanded, privacy-invading tactics of the paparazzi in the name of scoring potentially degrading shots of ... ooh, look, Lindsay's panties!

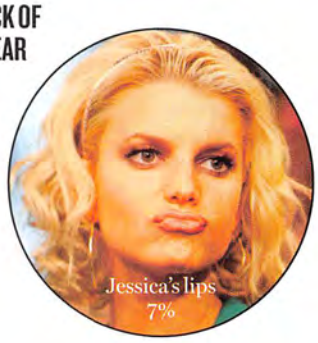
9

NIP/TUCK OF THE YEAR

Ashlee's nose
62%

Tara Reid's funbags
20%

Whatever it is Axl did to himself
11%



Jessica's lips
7%

Testifies Devin Washington of Salem, Oregon: "Plastic surgery gets a bad rap for transforming formerly good-looking people into zombies—I'm talking to you, Melanie Griffith and Mickey Rourke—but whoever worked his magic on Ashlee's mug has single-handedly redeemed the entire industry."

His talents: Freeloading, free-styling, *breathing underwater.*

10

DOUCHE BAG OF THE YEAR

Kevin Federline 53%
George W. 19%
Mel Gibson 12%
Brandon Davis 9%
Mark Foley 7%

Good to see Britney has nothing better to do than vote in silly online surveys all day.

LOHAN: BAUER-GRIFFIN.COM; HILTON: X17AGENCY.COM; ASHLEE SIMPSON: MAVRIXPHOTO.COM; ASHLEE SIMPSON: ABBOT/MAUCERI/INFGOFF.COM; REID: INFGOFF.COM; ROSE: MR. JCY/REX USA; JESSICA SIMPSON: EVAN AGOSTINI/GETTY IMAGES; FEDERLINE: ALEXEI HAY/ICON INTERNATIONAL.

NOISEMAKERS

"AIN'T NOBODY FEELIN' THAT WAR." DIDDY 12%

"I DON'T HAVE A COCK AT THE MOMENT, SO I WEAR ONE AROUND MY NECK." JESSICA SIMPSON 34%

"I'M NOT, LIKE, THAT SMART." PARIS HILTON 44%

"THIS ALBUM IS ONE OF THE BEST ALBUMS OF THE PAST 20 YEARS." BRANDON FLOWERS 1%

"I INVENTED THUNDER AND RAIN. I AM THE BLACK." MARILYN MANSON 2%

"THUGS DON'T DO FLIP-FLOPS." DMX 7%

11
WHERE WAS SEXY BEFORE JUSTIN BROUGHT IT BACK?

Hills in Tora Bora 3%
Undisclosed bunker 4%
Backpacking in Europe 8%
Diddy was borrowing it 17%
Sexy never left 68%

To D. Purkle of L.A., who asks, "When are the 'bringing sexy back' jokes gonna stop?" Not yet, D., not yet.

12
VIDEO GAME OF THE YEAR

Battlefield 2142 ..... 30%
The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion 21%
Brain Age 18%
Bully 16%
Gears of War 15%

Donkey Kong Jr: shut out again.

13
HIP-HOP NOVELTY DANCE OF THE YEAR

Lean Wit It, Rock Wit It 51%
Chicken Noodle Soup 27%
Ditty Bop 10%
Motorcycle 10%
Poole Palace 2%

Blender is not responsible for any injuries suffered by readers attempting to decide a winner.

14
FAVORITE BLOG

Pink Is the New Blog 47%
The Superficial 32%
Stereogum 8%
Idolator 7%
GoldenFiddle 6%

Leslie Carwell of Austin writes in, hilariously, "Books!"

15
YOUTUBE VIDEO OF THE YEAR

Cat falling asleep 4%
Cat talking 9%
Cat jumping on baby 12%
Cat swinging on ceiling fan 20%
Cat flushing toilet 22%
Lil' Superstar break-dancing 33%

Despite its absence of cats doing eerily humanlike things, the clip of the Indian midget popping and locking will be the video you miss the most once Google ruins everything cool about YouTube.

16
QUOTE OF THE YEAR

Sorry, Manson—it seems that humility and frank honesty as exhibited by the always introspective Miss Hilton are the *new* black.

17
FAVORITE PETE DOHERTY ARREST

The one with the heroin 6%
The one on the airplane 9%
The other one with the heroin 11%
The one with the blood-filled syringes 24%
The one that happened since we published this 50%

Since when is everyone so damn cynical? Sheesh.

18
THINGS THAT ARE FUNNIER THAN DANE COOK

Will Ferrell 41%
Nothing 22%
Cat flushing a toilet 18%
Colon cancer 12%
Jimmy Fallon 7%

Jason B. of Albuquerque demurs, and we quote: "U guys r faggets for including this catagory Dane rules and is the biggest comidien in the world and gets more ass than u ever will I hope u get colin cancer assholes." We stand corrected.

DIDDY: REX USA; SIMPSON: ERIK C. PENDZICH/REX USA; FLOWERS: JASON MOORE/ZUMA PRESS/NEWSCOM; DMX: ERIK C PENDZICH/REX USA; HILTON: ROGER WONG/INFGOFF.COM; MANSON: PETER BROOKER/REX USA; FERRELL: PHOTOFEST; DOHERTY: HUGO PHILPOTT/EPA/CORBIS.

19
THE MOTHER TERESA AWARD FOR BRINGING A LITTLE GLITZ TO THE OTHERWISE DRAB THIRD WORLD

Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt 68%
Nicole Kidman 13%
Madonna 12%
Jay-Z 7%

Recent surveys indicate that one-third of all African refugee children will be adopted by Hollywood starlets by decade's end. The cute ones, anyway.

23
REALITY BREAKOUT STAR

Brooke Hogan (*Hogan Knows Best*) 45%

Danity Kane (*Making the Band 3*) 24%

Lukas Rossi (*Rock Star: Supernova*) 17%

Deelishis (*Flavor of Love 2*) 14%

But she doesn't even wrestle!

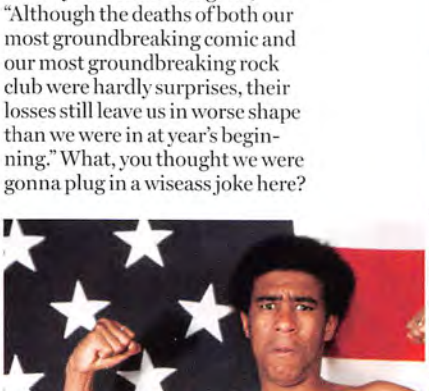
HOW WE DID IT
Readers voted at Blender.com and AOLmusic.com, after which the results were tabulated by some dude named John. Then we published them.

07

SADDEST FAREWELL

Richard Pryor 57%
CBGB 18%
Deadwood 12%
Proof 9%
Syd Barrett 4%

J. Bessy of Detroit eulogizes, "Although the deaths of both our most groundbreaking comic and our most groundbreaking rock club were hardly surprises, their losses still leave us in worse shape than we were in at year's beginning." What, you thought we were gonna plug in a wiseass joke here?



Pryor's *Patton* audition, while inspired, didn't quite pan out.

21
FEUD OF THE YEAR

Oprah vs. Rappers 46%
Lindsay vs. Scarlett 32%
Brandon Flowers vs. Green Day/Tom DeLonge/ Fall Out Boy 11%
Panic! At the Disco vs. the entire Reading Festival 8%
Troy Gentry vs. Bear 3%

Just so everyone's clear here, we're not saying anything negative about Oprah or any of her subsidiary interests, OK?

22
HAPPIEST TO SEE 2006 OVER

Britney Spears 53%
Jessica Simpson 42%
Eminem 4%
DMX 1%

Brit's gonna look much better in 2007—she's already lost nearly 200 pounds.

Line up, gents: She's available!

JOLIE AND PITT: BRENNAN LINSLEY/AP PHOTO; HOGAN: VINCE BUCCI/GETTY IMAGES; DANITY KANE: JOSEPH MARZULLO/RETNA LTD.; ROSSI: VICTOR WOLDER/SPLASH NEWS;

24

JESSICA SIMPSON'S MOST EMBARRASSING MOMENT OF THE YEAR

A Public Affair outsold by Nick Lachey's record 40%

Ashlee becomes the hot Simpson sister 26%

Failure of Dessert Beauty product line 22%

Employee of the Month bombs at the box office 12%

Says Greg B. of Darien, Connecticut: "Getting whupped on the charts by 98 Degrees dude is bad, but never would I have thought that one of the hottest girls in the world would be considered less attractive than her horse-faced bratty sister. The Apocalypse must be nigh."

25

YEAR'S MOST CONVINCING EVIDENCE OF KEITH RICHARDS'S IMPERVIOUSNESS TO MORTAL PERIL

Falling out of coconut tree without sustaining serious neurological damage 67%

Smoking 19%

Maintaining grueling tour schedule 7%

Acting in big-budget swashbuckler epic 7%

The best part? Keef has no recollection of any of these things happening.

26

THE BILLY JOEL AWARD FOR 2006'S LOUSIEST DRIVER

50 Cent 44%

Paris Hilton 28%

George Michael 15%

Chad Kroeger 13%

Mary Peterson of Totowa, New Jersey, offers this reasonable write-in alternative: "Why not Billy Joel?"

27

HIGH OF THE YEAR

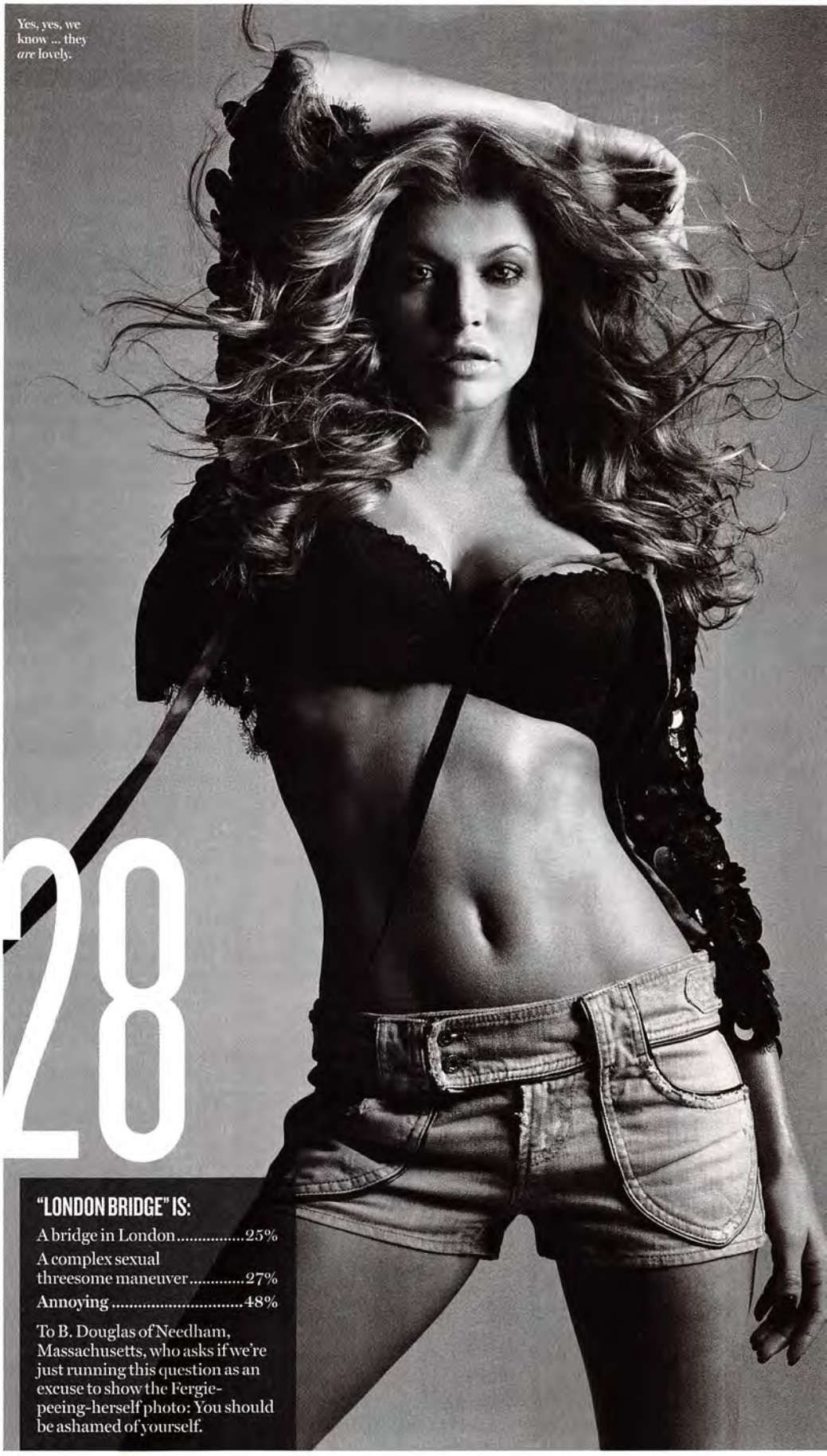
Life 64%

Cocaine: energy drink 18%

Regular old cocaine 10%

Strawberry cocaine 8%

You pussies.



Yes, yes, we know ... they *are* lovely.

28

"LONDON BRIDGE" IS:

A bridge in London 25%

A complex sexual threesome maneuver 27%

Annoying 48%

To B. Douglas of Needham, Massachusetts, who asks if we're just running this question as an excuse to show the Fergie-peeing-herself photo: You should be ashamed of yourself.

FERGIE: MICHAEL THOMPSON; COVER: NEW YORK POST.

Clipse, whistling innocently.

THE 50 GREATEST CDS OF 2006

WHIP-SMART CRACK RAPPERS: 4. STRATOSPHERE-TARGETING EMO GRADS: 2. DIVAS: 4 (IF YOU COUNT JUSTIN). AND 40 OTHER REASONS '06 ROCKED ...

BY JON DOLAN, JOSH EELLS, WILL HERMES, CHRIS NORRIS, JODY ROSEN, ROB TANNENBAUM, JONAH WEINER AND DOUGLAS WOLK

PHOTOGRAPH BY KENNETH CAPPELLO

STYLING: IKE BOGARD FOR THE B. LYNN GROUP. CLOTHING, FROM LEFT: SUIT: VALENTINO. SHIRT: NORDSTROM. TIE: PURPLE LABEL BY RALPH LAUREN. TIE CLIP: ALFRED DUNN HILL. POCKET SQUARE: PURPLE LABEL BY RALPH LAUREN. SHOES: BERLUTI. SUIT: GUCCI. SHIRT: PURPLE LABEL BY RALPH LAUREN. TIE: FASCINOUS. POCKET SQUARE: PURPLE LABEL BY RALPH LAUREN. SHOES: BERLUTI.

Troy Sanders: "My beard smells like my lunch."

ALL ABOUT MY YEAR

TROY SANDERS

MASTODON GROWLER LOVES WHALES, ROLLER-SKATING

Favorite toy of 2006
I got an R2-Pota2 doll in Japan—it's a Mr. Potato Head that looks like R2-D2.

Best sex of the year
We're all married dudes, so we just watch our road crew be dirty.

Trend you're most sick of
Geometric haircuts that look like they were done with compasses, rulers and protractors. We saw a lot of that this year, all over Europe and America. It's like the resurgence of '80s glam, where you'd see Poison on a record cover and you'd buy it because those chicks were hot as hell.

Country the U.S. should "liberate" next
We should liberate the whales from Iceland, which just started hunting them again. Why they gotta do that? Whales are killer.

"WE'RE ALL MARRIED DUDES, SO WE JUST WATCH OUR ROAD CREW BE DIRTY."

Most shameful moment
Slayer revealed on TV that my hair is actually authentic Siberian-woolly-mammoth hair that was grafted onto my head. The word is out, I'm busted—my hair is 2 million years old.

What are you going to rename your adopted African baby?
I'm hoping to get mine from Zamunda, and I'm gonna give him a Mexican name: Paco. Paco from Zamunda.

Have you covered "Crazy" yet? Any plans to?
No plans. I just heard that song for the first time a week ago. I was putting together a mix tape of good roller-skating music, and that's on there.

Ambition/hope for 2007
I can't wait to see the original Genesis back together. Peter Gabriel needs to join in, and they should perform the entire *The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway*. And I'd like to get to the beach more.

Do you know where we can get some strawberry cocaine?
First I've heard of this, but it sounds great.

Obsession of the year
As of right now, strawberry cocaine.

50
BE YOUR OWN PET
BE YOUR OWN PET
ECSTATIC PEACE!/UNIVERSAL
The Nashville teen-punks' debut is a monument to youth in all its hyperactivity and prankish antagonism. The year's catchiest tantrum.

49
BORIS
PINK
SOUTHERN LORD
This Japanese noise trio's fifth album is a stunning blues-metal squall, stanky with marijuana and drunk with distortion.

48
THE RAKES
CAPTURE/RELEASE
V2
In Cockney accents, the Rakes revisit the eternal verities of pub-crawling young malcontents: stark guitars, punchy rhythms, witty neuroses.

47
LUPE FIASCO
FOOD & LIQUOR
ATLANTIC
Don't let the backpack fool you: Though Lupe Fiasco comes on like a crunchy, conscious rapper, his skills are strictly A-list. Nerd-rap even a thug can love.

46
THE OOHLAS
BEST STOP POP
STOLEN TRANSMISSION
Fronted by the ex-drummer of Everclear, this L.A. band recalls '90s shoegazer pop, dipping sugar-sharp Breeders-style tunes in pools of mysterious noise.

45
YOUNG JEEZY
THE INSPIRATION
DEF JAM
Over apocalyptic synths, hip-hop's favorite trap-rapper stays on message—crack, crack, crack.

44
JENNY LEWIS
RABBIT FUR COAT
TEAM LOVE
On her solo debut, the Rilo Kiley frontwoman hones the intimate side of her band's epic indie-rock into a twang-and-cocaine country-soul record.

43
BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
WE SHALL OVERCOME
COLUMBIA
Recorded in his New Jersey farmhouse with a 14-piece band, Springsteen's tribute to '60s singer Pete Seeger is folk without the reverential air.

42
RAY LAMONTAGNE
TILL THE SUN TURNS BLACK
RCA
A lovelorn folkster, LaMontagne builds nuance out of a worried rasp and a jones for '70s folk rock from CSN&Y to Nick Drake.

41
MASTODON
BLOOD MOUNTAIN
WARNER BROS.
Superspeed guitars and monstrous growls punctuate a bizarre tale about a mountain of blood and mystical beasts. Forget Satan. Hail Gandalf!

SANDERS: DANIEL ELLIOTT/LFI.

40
TV ON THE RADIO
RETURN TO COOKIE MOUNTAIN
INTERSCOPE
A dreamy, dissonant mesh of screwed-up samples and screwed-down noise guitar that made fans of David Bowie and college-radio jocks.

39
CSS
CANSEI DE SER SEXY
SUB POP
Pound for pound, no 2006 band was as fun as this cheeky São Paolo six-piece. Over spiky electro-punk beats, singer Lovefoxxx gets snarktastic.

38
NEIL YOUNG
LIVING WITH WAR
REPRISE
His first album of protest-rock, recorded in two weeks, has the blunt urgency of reading the paper and writing a rant—about the environment, illegal wiretaps and so on.

37
GNARLS BARKLEY
ST. ELSEWHERE
DOWNTOWN
Feng shui raps? Violent Femmes covers? They ruled the airwaves with "Crazy" this summer, and they flaunt the most irreverent sense of humor to hit R&B in decades.

36
NELLIE MCKAY
PRETTY LITTLE HEAD
HUNGRY MOUSE
A precocious pop fan dresses up her giddily inventive cabaret songs like Kirsten Dunst in *Marie Antoinette*, from a gay-marriage proposal to a rap ballad quoting Public Enemy.

35
YO LA TENGO
I AM NOT AFRAID OF YOU AND I WILL BEAT YOUR ASS
MATADOR
Yo La Tengo entered their third decade with a record of sweet '60s pop tunes about hanging tough in a cruel world.

34
SCRITTI POLITTI
WHITE BREAD BLACK BEER
NONESUCH
After three decades in exile, a masterpiece: trip-hop ambience and romantic frankness from a guy who used to shout-out Hegel.

33
YEAH YEAH YEAHS
SHOW YOUR BONES
INTERSCOPE
This bummed-out album about ruined love left some fans grumbling, but it's the same mix of bristling art-punk noise, pop smarts and sheer rock-star magnetism from singer Karen O.

32
BRAND NEW
THE DEVIL AND GOD ARE RAGING INSIDE ME
TINY EVIL/INTERSCOPE
In the '06 tradition of retardedly ambitious emo, *Devil* grapples with issues of spirituality, good and evil.

31
THE DECEMBERISTS
THE CRANE WIFE
CAPITOL
Singer Colin Meloy works the English language like a door-to-door thesaurus salesman, dropping words like *parallax* and *fontanel* into a richly orchestrated song cycle.

30
THE STROKES
FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF EARTH
RCA
Lacking the first-kiss magic of their bubbly new wave, but they still explore bad love and rough comedowns with vampiric rapture.

29
NELLY FURTADO
LOOSE
GEFFEN
In which a heretofore barefoot-hippie folk-world-pop slinger straps on some moon boots and boards the Timbaland Intergalactic Express.

28
EVANESCENCE
THE OPEN DOOR
WIND-UP
All-American darksider sweetheart Amy Lee's got a boy on the brain, and he's eliciting feelings they just don't tell you about at church camp.

27
CAT POWER
THE GREATEST
MATADOR
Little Miss Queen of Melancholy outdoes herself, with Southern soul pros adding slinky grooves to her breathy songs about love and other disasters.

26
THE GAME
DOCTOR'S ADVOCATE
GEFFEN
A fascinating exercise in unrequited hero worship, Game's Impala-rattling latest is the best Dr. Dre album Dr. Dre had nothing to do with.

25
THE KILLERS
SAM'S TOWN
ISLAND
Amply stocked with highways, rivers and gorgeous riffs, this is *The Joshua Tree* as Vegas attraction: an homage and facsimile, but packed with hooks.

"Now to find a harpsichordist with a trilby!"

ALL ABOUT MY YEAR

COLIN MELOY

THE DECEMBERISTS FRONTMAN AND AVOWED FUNDAMENTALIST-HATER

Favorite new word or catchphrase
The *double-puff muff*. It's not as nasty as it sounds—it's a breakfast sandwich, but on an English muffin.

Man-crush of 2006
I'll say Stephen Colbert. We could play Dungeons & Dragons.

Country the U.S. should "liberate" next
Florida. The weather's too nice—we need to liberate them from their joie de vivre.

Will you be our MySpace friend?
Absolutely—we'll be anybody's friend. We're MySpace whores.

Best sex you've had this year
This is really personal! I guess the mid-tour, haven't-seen-each-other-in-three-weeks, hotel-room-in-the-middle-of-the-night sex. Hell yeah.

Favorite prescription medication
Percocet, for my battered soul.

Trend you're most sick of
Right-wing evangelical Christians foisting their ideas onto other people. It would be one thing if they were harmless, but they actually have weekly meetings with George Bush and have sway at the White House. It's terrifying.

Where were you the moment you heard that Lance Bass was gay?
I didn't know he was. That's good—I wish more people would come out. Especially evangelicals.

What have you done to bring sexy back?
I brought a potentially very handsome young man into the world to wreak havoc on the female population—or male, depending on his druthers. His name's Hank, and I think he'll be a heartbreaker.

COURTESY OF AUTUMN DE WILDE/AP PHOTO.

24
BECK
THE INFORMATION
INTERSCOPE

Searching for roots in a bottomless Dumpster of yesterday's noise

It's a return to basics, which in his case means wackier and more postmodern than ever. But rather than shrug forth a do-over of his 1996 sample classic *Odelay*, an older and wiser Mr. Hansen uses the same sonic tomfoolery to contemplate a scary world, singing "I'm a seasick sailor/On a ship of noise" over superblurpy future funk. From tempestuous hip-hop to demon blues to psychedelic meta-schmaltz, the bard of bad karma stays ahead of the curve while remaining true to the lovable loser within.

23
DIXIE CHICKS
TAKING THE LONG WAY
OPEN WIDE/COLUMBIA

Nashville's ballsy Bush-haters aren't ready to make nice (or a country album)

OK, so they sold a zillion fewer albums this time around. That's what happens in Nashville when you diss the president and brag about refusing to apologize. Politics were the talking point, but the burlier, Rick Rubin–produced rock-pop sound made this the catchiest and toughest Dixie Chicks release. The tamped-down mandolins and fiddles telegraph the band's alienation from Nashville, but songs like "Silent House" are still driven by a sound so gorgeously, purely country that they could melt Toby Keith's heart.

22
BEYONCÉ
B'DAY
COLUMBIA/SONY URBAN MUSIC

Grown and sweaty, Beyoncé's a big girl now

Falling in love makes some people complacent and boring. But it makes Beyoncé shake that immaculately conceived thing and *uh* that *oh* crazier than ever. *B'Day* doesn't have a "Say My Name" or a "Crazy in Love," but as balanced between club-torching bangers "Ring the Alarm," sass-mouthed R&B struts like "Suga Mama" and ballads like "Irreplaceable"—on which she truly hands a man his ass—it's her coming-of-age classic. Not just a *B'Day*, it's a New Year's party and the religious holiday of your choice.

21
T.I.
KING
GRAND HUSTLE/ATLANTIC

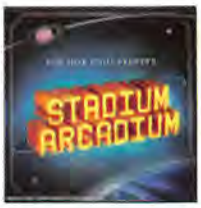
On *ATL* hero's breakthrough set, all the world's a trap

In 2006, Dirty South hip-hop domination continued, and no album did more to perpetuate the reign than this one. T.I.'s sonics are the best thing about him: Virtually incapable of consonants, he's as soothing as a gangsta can get, and he likes to rhyme sounds and phrases so similar to each other that his verses often sound like hypnotic, wordless mantras. Tucked into those verses, though, are clever brags, intricate patterns and unexpected punch lines. Beats as effortlessly triumphant as the symphonic, synth-driven "What You Know" don't hurt, either.

20
LAMB OF GOD
SACRAMENT
EPIC

Hell hath no fury like a screwed-up metalhead

When you have a speed-metal band from Virginia, with a singer named Randy Blythe, yowling songs entitled "Blacken the Cursed Sun," the prospects for deep-fried black-trench-coat insanity (not to mention bodily harm) are most excellent. But the decidedly not-Christian Lamb of God aren't just mad at, well, everything, they're extremely precise at meting out their venom. Double bass drums sound like flapping bat wings, and the Randster's gruesome "fuck you"s suggest the Beastmaster himself, if they got his order wrong at the Richmond White Castle.



19
RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS
STADIUM ARCADIUM
WARNER BROS.

Raising their game to Ph.D. level, four Cali funkers turn into Dr. Peppers

This mamma-jamma of a double album provides the year's best definition of *portentous*: Said to be inspired by Kabbalah, it's broken into sides "Jupiter" and "Mars." Still, the tracks flex more muscle and erectile function than anything these forty-something vets have done in years. Even aside from FM pleasure-hitters like "Dani California," it's a buffet of mercurial guitar tones and gut-punching grooves, with producer Rick Rubin distilling the best flavors from 23 Pepper years.

"I LIKE THAT JAMES BLUNT SONG 'YOU'RE BEAUTIFUL.'"

ALL ABOUT MY YEAR

T.I.

HIP-HOP'S KING OF THE SOUTH AND ANTI-NUKE ADVOCATE

Favorite song of 2006
I like that James Blunt song "You're Beautiful."

Most outlandish purchase
I just bought a boat—a 25-footer. I also got an Aston Martin Vanquish, a Ferrari F430 and a Maybach. And I'm really proud of the latest old-school purchase I made, a '69 GTO Judge. I done bought a lot of shit this year!

Favorite new word or catchphrase
When Puff was on the Proactiv commercial, he said he had to moisturize his situation and preserve his sexy. So if I'm getting ready for the club, I'll say, "I've got to go moisturize my situation. Preserve my sexy."

Favorite prescription medication
I don't need it myself, but that Viagra is one hell of a drug. I heard it gets the job done.

Trend you're most sick of
Going to jail and telling on people. That needs to stop. That shit is not cool.

Favorite sign of the apocalypse
You know when North Korea started testing them nuclear weapons? I was in Japan at the time. I was kinda shook.

Country the U.S. should "liberate" next
I think we need to mind our damn business. We need to work on getting this shit straight over here before we go forcing anybody else to do anything.

What have you done to bring sexy back?
I told you, I'm preserving my sexy! I don't have to bring it back.

Man-crush of 2006
Ohhh, no. No males in the crush category, period.

Favorite YouTube video
I ain't really a big computer buff. That's probably what I need to start doing next year. Those MySpace people, they got rich off that shit. Those folks at Google ran to the bank.

Do you know where we can score some strawberry cocaine?
I haven't been in the market for cocaine since the '90s, and only then as a supplier. But I can tell you about that banana-berry kush ...

What are you going to rename your adopted African baby?
I got five kids, man. I don't need no extras!

ALEXEI HAY/ICON INTERNATIONAL.

18
SONIC YOUTH
RATHER RIPPED
GEFFEN

Every noise rocker's dream foster parents still have a spring in their step

Twenty-five years after they invented a clanging Lower East Side punk sound youths still rip off, these graying noise wizards can pretty much do whatever they want. On their last few albums, that's meant a lot of meandering wankiness. But this time, singer-guitarist Thurston Moore and bass-playing wife, Kim Gordon, show how grown-up they are by turning it down just a bit, playing some blues and even a ballad, and finding new contours in a sound that never seems to get old.

17
NEW YORK DOLLS
ONE DAY IT WILL PLEASE US TO REMEMBER EVEN THIS
ROADRUNNER

Drag-queen punk-metal forefathers get dolled up again

In an eventful year for old-school New York rock, the punk shrine CBGB closed and the influential Dolls finally made a third record—30-plus years after the band ended in a train wreck of egos and heroin habits. Only two original members remain: wizened singer David Johansen and hook-hungry guitarist Sylvain Sylvain. But with some local buds, they made a disc worthy of the Dolls' proto-punk legacy, a blast of gutter-pop with libido and comic timing intact.

16
JOHN LEGEND
ONCE AGAIN
G.O.O.D./COLUMBIA/SONY URBAN MUSIC

Kanye West's soulful little buddy returns—with 88 percent more libido!

John Legend is one classy dude: Ivy League diploma, polished neosoul pedigree, a closetful of cable-knit turtlenecks. But inside there's a freak just dying to get out. On his sophomore album, the silky piano man distracts the ladies with velvet-lounge slow jams while he plots how best to bend them over his baby grand. It peaks with "P.D.A. (We Just Don't Care)," where he invites a lover to do it in the park, on a fire escape, at work when her boss is gone, even—*gasp!*—at her mama's house. Heads up, R. Kelly ...

15
LILY ALLEN
ALRIGHT, STILL
REGAL

Black-banged hellion gets revenge on an ex—over and over and over

Her album won't even turn up in American stores until January, but this acid-tongued 21-year-old Brit is already a staple on iTunes playlists here and abroad—she built her buzz through a MySpace page and a couple of online "mix tapes." Allen's airy but cynical post-hip-hop pop owes as much to show tunes and the Kaiser Chiefs as to 50 Cent; it borrows hooks from a fresh sample pool, including old ska, soft-porn soundtracks and New Orleans R&B.

14
TODD SNIDER
THE DEVIL YOU KNOW
NEW DOOR/UME

Alt-folk journeyman delivers the year's cheekiest Bush diss

The liner notes bill Snider as "Vice President, Abrupt Plan Changing Department, Aimless Inc." The Nashville guitar bard specializes in tales of drifters, fuckups and hell-raisers, and album nine masters the genre, setting vividly drawn short stories against Jerry Lee Lewis–style rockabilly and crackling country rock. The coup de grâce is "You Got Away With It," the year's sliest protest song, narrated by a party-hearty former frat buddy of President Bush's. "Look at you, old son of a bitch/You got run of this place," Snider drawls. "Unbelievable!"

13
GIRL TALK
NIGHT RIPPER
ILLEGAL ART

Amped-up Pittsburgh DJ throws a copyright-defying dance-floor bash

It sounds like something out of rock-geek fantasy camp: LCD Soundsystem on the turntables, Elastica and Stevie Wonder trading riffs, Britney and Ludacris taking turns rocking the mic. But it's just another blitzkrieg from 25-year-old Gregg Gillis, a cut-and-paste whiz who takes the mashup phenomenon to its mind-blowing logical conclusion. Gillis's third CD, a 42-minute head trip guided by a crate digger with impeccable taste, is also a thrilling game of catch-up: As soon as your ears adjust, he's off again, discovering where the next rabbit hole leads.

"I'm number 1! I'm number 1! (Plus 26)."

ALL ABOUT MY YEAR

CAT POWER

CLEANED-UP, BLOCKED-UP INDIE PRINCESS CHAN MARSHALL

Favorite song of 2006
"Ghetto" by Akon—the melody and the style of singing are great. And I'm a freak for the Mary J. Blige album. I've been in love with her for years.

Favorite new toy
Someone gave me a Sidekick III—it's essential to my happiness because I don't like talking on the phone. Texting is good. It makes saying no a lot easier.

Favorite new word or catchphrase
Ki-ki-in—it means talkin' smack. It's, like, girl talk—with my gay friends.

Girl-crush of 2006
Oprah. She's just sweet and funny.

Best sex of the year
The only sex I had. Is that bad?

Obsession of the year
English tea, Fortnum & Mason Royal Blend. I don't drink anymore, so I have to do something with my nerves.

Favorite prescription medication
That would have to be the 75 milligrams of Effexor I take every morning.

Country the U.S. should "liberate" next
Texas.

Most shameful moment
Telling Tony Bennett I missed his Hank Williams cover at Madison Square Garden because I was constipated in the backstage bathroom.

What are you going to rename your adopted African baby?
King!

Have you covered "Crazy" yet?
Yes! It's a great song: great harmony, great music, great lyrics, the whole triad.

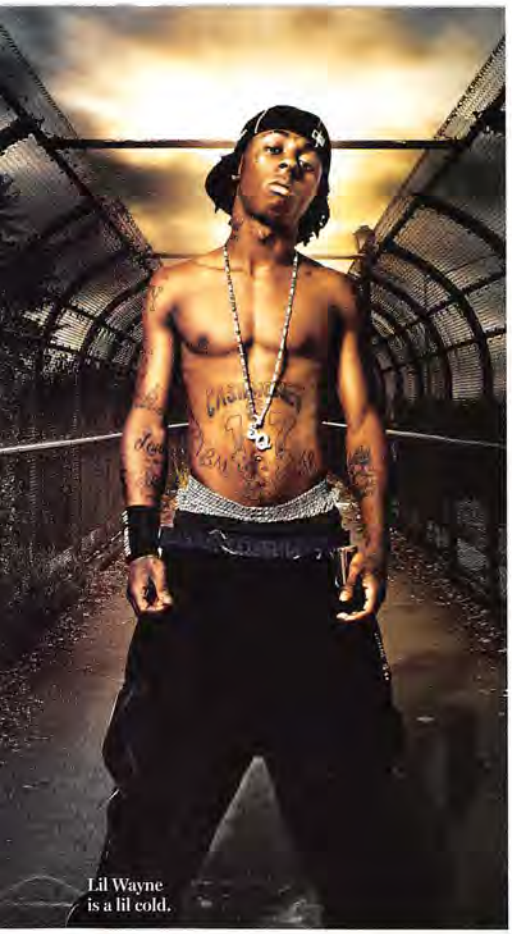
Where were you the moment you heard Lance Bass was gay?
I think I was reading *Blender*.

Ambition/hope for 2007
To sing a triet with Jay-Z and Mary J. Blige on "It's a Man's World." That's my word: *triet*. Our logo would be a triangle for Jay-Z, a cross for Mary J. and a heart for me. Internet singles, baby.

Do you know where we can get some strawberry cocaine?
In Miami, I'm sure. Sounds delicious, but I guess I'll never know.

Will you be our MySpace friend?
Sure. But I don't use a computer.

CAT POWER: PIETER M. VAN HATTEM/VISTALUX.



Lil Wayne is a lil cold.

ALL ABOUT MY YEAR

LIL WAYNE

NEW ORLEANS MC AND GOPHER STATE ENTHUSIAST

Favorite song of 2006
"We Fly High" by Jim Jones. I ride with Jim.

Favorite new word or catchphrase
Believe that.

Favorite sign of the Apocalypse
That's gay. Next question.

Biggest time-suck
I ain't gonna lie: bitches.

Best sex you had this year
I think it was Minnesota. The girls were real fine, and there was more than a couple of them.

Where were you the moment you heard Lance Bass was gay?
Who's that, the dude from 'N Sync? I think I read it in a magazine at the airport—he was at a gay party or something, looking all happy and shit. I've been saying he was gay for a while, but I'm just a nigga—we call all people like that gay.

"MONEY MAKES ME SEXY."

Favorite prescription medication
Promethazine with codeine. That's cough syrup—lean. I like to mix it with Hawaiian Punch.

What have you done to bring sexy back?
I don't have to bring sexy back. I'm paid. Money makes me sexy.

What are you going to rename your adopted African baby?
Oh, like how Madonna and them got little black kids? I think that's gangsta. We need somebody with money to come save our ass. But I have a beautiful 8-year-old daughter named Reginae, and if I brought home any other children, she'd be real jealous.

Do you know where we can score some strawberry cocaine?
That's a white-people's drug. We niggas—if we get on some coke, we gonna kill the world.

Will you be our MySpace friend?
Oh, for sure!

Ambition/hope for 2007
To make sure all my people get paid. Believe that.

12
DJ DRAMA & LIL WAYNE
DEDICATION 2
GANGSTA GRILLZ

For once, a dude who calls himself the "best rapper alive" might be right

There's a famous story about Michael Jordan making the rest of his basketball team wait on the bus for an hour and a half while he won back his money in a post-workout shooting contest. The point being, champions hate to lose—even in practice. New Orleans MC Lil Wayne must feel the same way. Expertly curated by Atlanta mix-tape impresario DJ Drama, *Dedication 2* is a tossed-off, gray-market masterpiece with more great lines than most rappers can manage their whole careers. Best of all, it's only six bucks.

11
REGINA SPEKTOR
BEGIN TO HOPE
SIRE

Strokes cohort makes the year's best oddball-piano-diva CD

A less flamboyant Fiona Apple, a more street-level Tori Amos, Regina Spektor is a heroine to a growing legion of bookish teenage girls and the boys who dog them. A Russian-émigré piano prodigy who is nevertheless totally New Yawk, she takes her songwriting to a new level here—singing about love and city life with a touch of the surreal, capturing the unnervingly yummy emptiness of fly-by-night sex and writing cocaine lyrics nearly as catchy as Young Jeezy's.

10
ART BRUT
BANG BANG ROCK & ROLL
DOWNTOWN

Snotty punks whose cynicism is as infectious as their mega-catchy tunes

"No more songs about sex and drugs and rock & roll/It's boring," singer Eddie Argos shouts on his totally not-boring rock & roll band's debut, released in 2005 as a U.K. import. Snotty know-it-alls have been forming bands for aeons, but they rarely bring the galvanizing snark of these London wits. Mocking the cheesy notion of writing a hit about a girl, or the star-chasing dream of "drinking Hennessy with Morrissey," they're so spunky you almost believe they're not just taking the piss.

9
CLIPSE
HELL HATH NO FURY
RE-UP GANG/JIVE

Long-awaited second album from the wittiest, vilest coke-rappers in hip-hop

Clipse are disgusting, and that's how they like it. Two brothers who believe lyrics should be wicked complex and villains unrepentantly wicked, they channel the vintage fatalism of Mobb Deep and N.W.A. Backed here by nasty, hollow beats from the Neptunes, Malice and Pusha T regard coke not simply as a means toward wealth, but as a way to destroy the weak. It's the story of the urban crack epidemic told from the bad guys' perspective: a tragedy shoved under our noses, rotten, stinking and—perversely—addictive as hell.

8
MARY J. BLIGE
THE BREAKTHROUGH
GEFFEN

Happily married MJB is still pop's queen of pain

No more drama in my life, Mary J. Blige pledged a few years ago. *As if.* Musical melodrama is Blige's stock-in-trade, and she's not about to let a little wedded bliss get in her way. On *The Breakthrough*, her happy marriage brings plenty of agitation: fears of abandonment, daddy issues, painful flashbacks to the bad old days. The album also features her most assured singing, in beat-propelled hip-hop/soul tracks, churchy Aretha Franklin–style ballads and a stunning collaboration with U2, in which she out-belts another great drama queen, Bono.

7
THE HOLD STEADY
BOYS AND GIRLS IN AMERICA
VAGRANT

An all-American rock & roll odyssey from New York's favorite Springsteen-loving antiheroes

No songwriter can spin a tale of ruined youth like yapping lapsed Catholic Craig Finn, but on this third album his Brooklyn-via-Minneapolis band of classic-rock-loving punks aren't just poets of teenage wasteland, they're jukebox heroes, too. Quoting Jack Kerouac and stealing tunes from the Boss and .38 Special, writing unironic piano ballads about scary first nights and summer rock fests, they author an all-American prom-night soundtrack for all the kids who passed out in the limo on the way to the dance.

LIL WAYNE: SACHA WALDMAN/JBGPHOTO.COM.

6
THE BEATLES
LOVE
APPLE/CAPITOL

The most familiar songs in rock history, made fresh

It was stitched together like a cherished pair of worn, patched blue jeans: Producer George Martin, who helped the band create these monuments, took the original master tapes and wove riffs, choruses, drum solos and a cappella passages from 130 different songs into a 78-minute array of remixes and medleys and mashups. It seems like sacrilege, like putting a Marc Jacobs miniskirt on the Statue of Liberty or finding your mom on MySpace. At first, it's a shock. After a few seconds, you're on a fascinating expedition.

5
GHOSTFACE KILLAH
FISHSCALE
DEF JAM

Wu-Tang veteran's fifth solo joint is the hip-hop album of the year

Ghostface raps about selling cocaine, but he sometimes seems like an investigator on *CSI*. For this sharp-eyed MC, it's all in the details: a Cranberry-flavored Snapple, the two of diamonds he uses to chop lines, the thug lurking in the corner with "the centipede stab wound." Over a schizophrenic mix of dusty soul samples and pulse-rate-jacking beats, Ghost sputters breathless street tales brimming with jokes and non sequiturs. And what other rapper would cop to having a bald spot?

4
JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE
FUTURESEX/ LOVESOUNDS
JIVE

Timberlake and Timbaland bring sexy back ... to the future

Timberlake may be a romantic at heart—almost half the songs on his magnum popus feature "love" in the title—but he's an absolute Lothario in his hips, his every falsetto squeal dripping with the nasty. Even the Britney kiss-off "What Goes Around..." sounds like one last grudge-fueled booty call. While JT bites his lip and moans, Timbaland plays Doc Brown, pimping the DeLorean into a space-age shaggin' wagon and fashioning beats that shudder and shiver with pleasure. This is what sex will sound like in 2147.

3
BOB DYLAN
MODERN TIMES
COLUMBIA

Dylan goes back to the blues, braces for the Apocalypse

So modern that its cover photo was taken in 1947, Bob Dylan's most blues-based album is a murky stew of allusions to his jukebox and bookshelf: One track is a near-cover of Muddy Waters's "Rollin' and Tumblin'," another rewrites a Bing Crosby oldie and a bunch of lines are lifted from Civil War poet Henry Timrod. Beneath Dylan's ragged croak and cracked overspill of language, these songs are about expecting the world's imminent end, and pledging his love in the meantime.

2
ARCTIC MONKEYS
WHATEVER PEOPLE SAY I AM, THAT'S WHAT I'M NOT
DOMINO

The boy-kings of U.K. rock, and pissed off about it

Only 20 years old and Alex Turner is already losing his taste for the nightlife. The Arctic Monkeys frontman rode the biggest wave of British hype since Oasis—the band's first single hit No. 1 on the U.K. charts—with an album's worth of brilliant diffidence: torrential, sneering tirades about too-late nights and overinflated hipsters. And he's backed up by a tense, wiry rock band that plays like somebody's going to slam the garage door on them if they don't finish fast enough.

1
MY CHEMICAL ROMANCE
THE BLACK PARADE
REPRISE

Cancer! Depression! Epaulets!

Bye-bye, emo. The first song on 2006's finest album is "The End," a bittersweet farewell to the scene that nurtured MCR. For this conceptual rock epic, MySpace messiah Gerard Way reemerged as "the Patient"—a compelling metaphor for a generation of kids beset by bioterror and Paxil overprescriptions. Taking cues from *Sgt. Pepper* and *Rocky Horror*, MCR battle through a ghoulish underworld featuring death, depression and Liza Minnelli; that they don't emerge unscathed is the point. After all, what good is a savior who hasn't suffered?

MY CHEMICAL ROMANCE: MARTIN SCHOELLER.

"IF I HAVE A KID, I'LL CALL HIM DRACULA."

ALL ABOUT MY YEAR

GERARD WAY

MY CHEMICAL ROMANCE SCREAMO KING AND UNIRONIC-MUSTACHE ADVOCATE

Favorite new band of 2006
Mew, from Scandinavia. They're huge in Europe, but I just found out about them. It's breathtaking fantasy rock.

Favorite new catchphrase
I'm tired of these motherfucking snakes on this motherfucking plane.

What are you going to rename your adopted African baby?
Dracula. I've always said, "If I have a kid, I'll call him Dracula."

Man-crush of 2006
Johnny Depp. He's been a steady winner for years now. Ask a lot of bands in black, they'll probably tell you him.

Favorite new toy
I got a Sidekick III, but it's really just a Sidekick II that's black. I love it. You can AIM people back home for pennies.

Trend you're most sick of
What are hipsters doing these days? Oh, right: the ironic mustache! Not that there's anything wrong with a real-ass mustache.

Favorite sign of the Apocalypse
This video I saw of Kevin Federline listening to "PopoZão."

Most outlandish purchase of the year
I got the entire original *Star Trek* TV series on DVD last night. Our record came out, and I wanted to get myself something nice. As if I didn't already have enough nerdy shit.

Country the U.S. should "liberate" next
None. I think we should send a country some cupcakes. You think some cupcakes would cheer up North Korea? Kill 'em with deliciousness.

Funniest YouTube video
I really hate physical violence, but there's this one where this kid is talking shit forever to this other kid, and the dude gets into this weird jujitsu pose and just knocks him out with one punch.

Ambition/hope for 2007
Quit smoking. That's my goal.

Will you be our MySpace friend?
Of course!

From left: Franz Nicolay, Galen Polivka, Bobby Drake, Craig Finn and Tad Kubler.

BAND OF THE YEAR

HOW A FORMER ACID DEALER AND AN EX-SECURITIES BROKER CREATED THE HOLD STEADY—THE BRAINIEST, BEER-SWILLINGEST, HANDS-DOWN BEST BAND OF '06

BY JON DOLAN PHOTOGRAPHY BY KENNETH CAPPELLO

IT'S FRIDAY NIGHT, and the Hold Steady have unloosed the Hammer of Thor (or one of his close relations) on a small Lower East Side rock club. Two hundred beer cups are raised aloft, as willowy girls and studently boys go low-impact bonkers, pleading for an encore. The digital-music company that hosted this private CMJ Music Marathon show kept invites to a minimum to avoid the round-the-block lines that would have greeted the local heroes, just back from a tour where singer-guitarist Craig Finn felt "something that's never been in the room before ... it was *magic*." Now, post-show and back in the New York groove, the question is, what plunder awaits the rapidly ascending rock band bounding offstage? A bevy of cute-banged blogger babes? Piles of strawberry cocaine? Free portable flash drives?

Nada. Instead of bum-rushing some >>

velvet rope, the five sweaty conquering heroes load up their gear in about 10 minutes and repair to their version of the Honeycomb hideout, a retro-chic restaurant called Freeman's, with decor suggesting a haute hunting lodge tucked into the end of a dark LES alley. The vibe is hip but decidedly low-key. "I would never stand in line to go to a bar," says Finn, his Minnesota accent dripping contempt. Tad Kubler, guitarist and cofounder of the Hold Steady with Finn, waited tables here a couple of weekends before the band went on tour to support their new album, *Boys and Girls in America*, but tonight they are VIPs. They use their cred, however, not to work the lounge, which is half-full of hipster girls—a few of whom might be Hold Steady fans ripe for post-show cultivation—but instead climb some dark back stairs to a loft-slash-office tricked out with a pool table, a mounted antelope and a fridge stocked with cans of Schaffer.

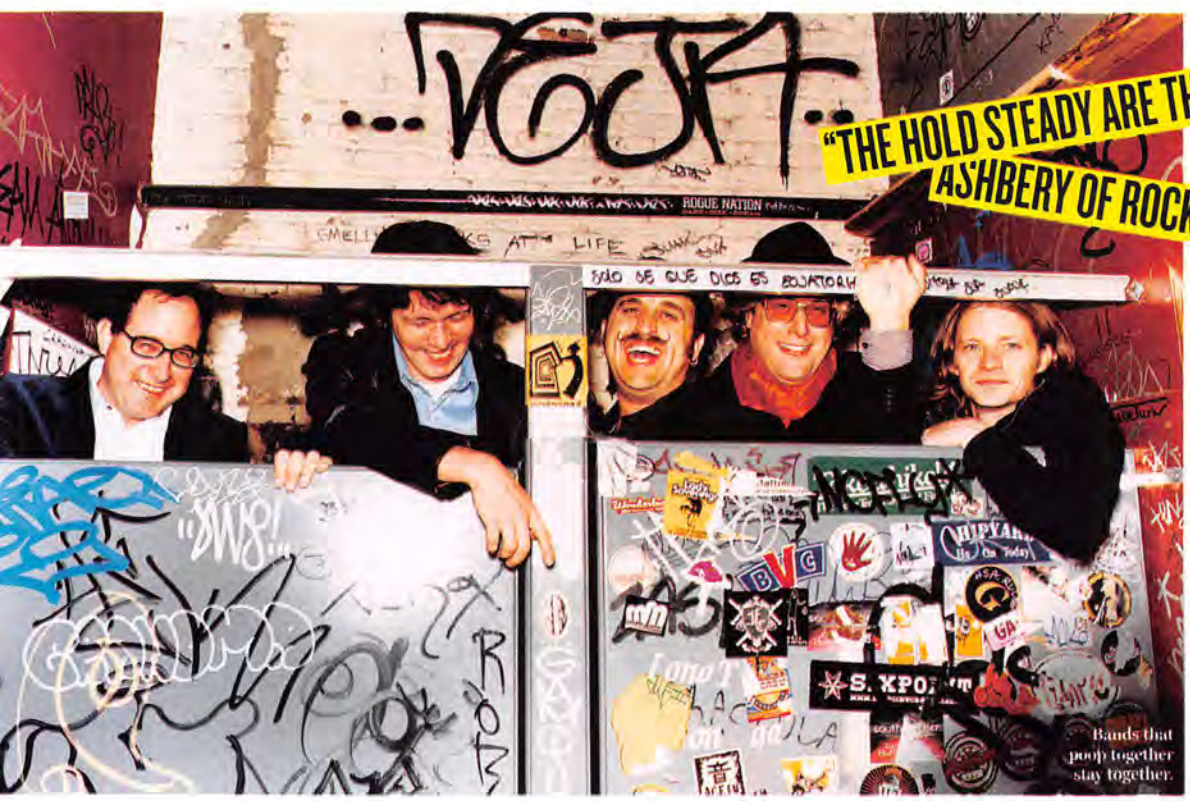
Finn, fresh from gesticulating onstage like a Pentecostal loon, spitting out songs, glasses askew, is now calmly chatting to a friend about his favorite subject: Minnesota sports trivia (his celebrity dream is to appear on Minnesota Twins great Kent Hrbek's fishing show). A husky guy in a Western shirt, Finn looks a little like the Mac guy crossed with the PC guy. Kubler, drummer Bobby Drake and bassist Galen Polivka, three tall corn-fed dudes, are shooting pool and wondering why Finn gives a damn. "I tell him," Kubler says. "'Don't get your hopes up for the Twins and Vikings; you're just gonna get disappointed.'" Keyboardist Franz Nicolay, whose English riding cap and Salvador Dalí mustache peg him as the band's aesthete, is talking about jazz and wine ("Shiraz is over. Next year it's all about Riojas"). A bottle of whiskey makes the rounds, Polivka curses his billiards luck and someone shotguns a beer—but in a noncommittal kind of way. "This isn't what you'd imagine the Strokes doing on a Friday," Kubler says.

He's aware the Strokes shoot pool and pop tops just like everyone else, but in the popular consciousness they also bag actresses in bars that exist beneath the Earth's mantle. If a popular consciousness has developed regarding the Hold Steady, this night's bros-over-ho's tableau is pretty much what springs to mind. Finn and Kubler are in their mid-30s. Finn is married (his wife works with autistic adults); Kubler has a kid with his long-term girlfriend. Polivka, 36, tends bar at the Hi Fi, an indie-rock Cheers in the East Village. ("Not the most cerebrally or physically stimulating work," he says.) Nicolay, 29, moonlights as a multi-instrumentalist in the local experimental-music community. Drake recently quit working an on-off job as a theatrical stagehand. It's all so un-glitzy, you might miss the fact that these average Joes are in the midst of a Valhallic rock & roll heyday.

"We can pretty much do what we want," Finn says. "If we were hot and 21 and wore eyeliner, our label might say, 'Hey, make that single a little shorter.' But they don't think it's gonna make a huge difference."

With this freedom, the Hold Steady have honed to perfection a frantic, wordy, guitar-crunching rock that's nothing like the hits of today's reigning pointy-haired drama kings. Finn's fever flashbacks of his youth—teetering between a studious Catholic kid and a beered-up punk rocker in Minneapolis—barked in the voice of a drunk doing stand-up in the back of a squad car, make mythical epics of post-teen flameout. And in a steady progression from 2004's *Almost Killed Me* to 2005's *Separation Sunday* to 2006's *Boys and Girls in America*, the band's music keeps getting classic-er and classic-er, as if trying to see what it would be like to back the poetry of Sylvia Plath with the muscle of Meat Loaf. *Boys and Girls*, released on high-power emo syndicate Vagrant Records, home of Dashboard Confessional, has sold more in its first weeks of release than their previous two albums combined. It received the highest review rating of the year from Pitchfork, and this summer the band played in front of thousands of people at Lollapalooza, a leap heroes like the Replacements and friends like Les Savy Fav never made.

"It was like we were Randy Moss play-



"THE HOLD STEADY ARE THE JOHN ASHBERY OF ROCK BANDS." JONATHAN LETHEM

Bands that poop together stay together.

KENNETH CAPPELLO

ing a Monday-night game," Finn says. "We got up for it."

Still, their total sales hover around 60,000. Nickelback will not be dodging the Hold Steady's chart comet anytime soon. On their biggest day, these rock-literate sports-heads are quintessentially a critic's band (the kind whose keyboardist takes an 800-page biography of African-American leftist entertainer Paul Robeson on tour). It's no stretch to class Finn, as postmodern storytellers go, among the best wordsmiths of his generation.

"The Hold Steady is the John Ashbery of rock bands," says Jonathan Lethem, best-selling Brooklyn author of *The Fortress of Solitude*, comparing Finn to the most important avant-garde American poet of the last 50 years. "There's an associative, punning surrealist tendency that is always grounded in the vagaries of a mind finding voice in the present moment."

The imagery in the Hold Steady's songs can be realistic, as in *Boys and Girls*' "Chillout Tent," a short story about a trip to a rockfest gone 'shroomishly awry; or their recent single "Chips Ahoy!," which sets its story about a girl who milks her clairvoyance to pick ponies and buy coke to a fists-aloft pop-punk chorus. But usually Finn's songs are intoxicated metaphor torrents, media-saturated spiels full of diagonal references and cryptic slang ("I always dream about a unified scene/ There's James King and King James and James Dean" he bellows on *Almost Killed Me*'s "Sweet Payne"). At the heart of all three albums are the stories of three Minnesota punks: Holly, née Hallelujah, bouncing from basement party to ER to confessional booth; Gideon, who appears in one song with a pipe made from a Pringles can; and Charlemagne, a drug dealer who packs his stash in his sweatpants. "The only records that have as many lyrics as ours are hip-hop records," Finn says proudly.

Boys and Girls in America takes its name from a line in Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*. Citing that Beat classic, Finn likes to say he's "more Sal Paradise than Dean Moriarty," an observer more than a participant, and like his favorite modernist poets, he rarely obscures his reporting with vague romanticism. "When I was a kid and I heard 'Run It' by the Replacements [a song about running red lights] and they said, 'Lyndale! Garfield!' those were streets I knew. Here was this amazing band from my town, singing about my town."

WHAT MAKES AN act so bookish, not to mention commercially challenged, *Blender*'s Band of the Year? Simple: Not in a long time has anyone this literary rocked this hard. They hew Finn's allusive flow to bar-band sprawl, written mainly by Kubler (who resists using "bar band" derogatorily). It's surprisingly universal, or "inclusive," to use Finn's term. "Being a Hold Steady fan shouldn't be that different from being a Tom Petty fan," he says. Their shows are beery and rollicking. (It's also a predominantly male experience: A blogging detractor, arguing that the band "sucks," notes sweepingly, "Girls don't like them.") Finn, who compares going on tour to a fishing trip, high-fives Kubler after nailing a song, often flashing a big, Gopher grin. He'll implore the crowd to clap out 16th notes, smack his head to punctuate a line, and use his guitar as a gavel or lightning rod as much as an instrument.

"People like a band that has drunk people who stand on kick drums," says bassist Polivka.

"Craig does this thing where he'll finish a beer and throw it at me," says Kubler. "And it'll get all over my pedals, and I told him not to do it anymore. So now when he does it, he always makes sure to look over and smile."

Finn likes to say that the ultimate rock & roll age is 17: "You have this mix of confidence and naïveté. Being 35 has helped me understand 17, even if I don't quite understand 35." Rock music usually offers 17-year-olds fantasies of power and escape, of growing up and taking over your life; the Hold Steady offer 35-year-olds fantasies of being 17 again, albeit a little bit more messed-up the second time around. This appeals to fans who might've spent their teenage years manning up for the SATs, but the band's images of high-school ruination are plenty firsthand.

When Tad Kubler hit the edge of 17, he decided to make some extra cash selling acid. One weekend while hanging out >>

RORY WALSH

"HEY, AREN'T YOU...?"

THE STREETS OF NYC ARE FILLED WITH DOPPELGÄNGERS FOR THE HOLD STEADY'S DILBERT-ESQUE **CRAIG FINN**. MEET FOUR FINN-ALIKES

Name: HARRIS MILMAN
Age: 33
Occupation: Software engineer
Favorite band: The Twilight Singers
How often do you get confused with Craig Finn? This is the first time.
If not Craig Finn, which famous person do people say you look like? Elvis Costello. I used to have those glasses.
How would you describe your look? Simple, urban cheap.

Name: JAMES FOGARTY
Age: 30
Occupation: Lawyer
Favorite band: A Tribe Called Quest
How often do you get confused with Craig Finn? Never
If not Craig Finn, which famous person do people say you look like? When I had longer hair, Hugh Grant—it was after the whole hooker arrest thing.
How would you describe your look? Average Irish guy.

Name: JOSHUA GELDZAHLER
Age: 29
Occupation: Art professor
Favorite artist: Kid Koala
How often do you get confused with Craig Finn? Never before. So once, I guess.
If not Craig Finn, which famous person do people say you look like? Ed from *Northern Exposure*.
How would you describe your look? Messy.

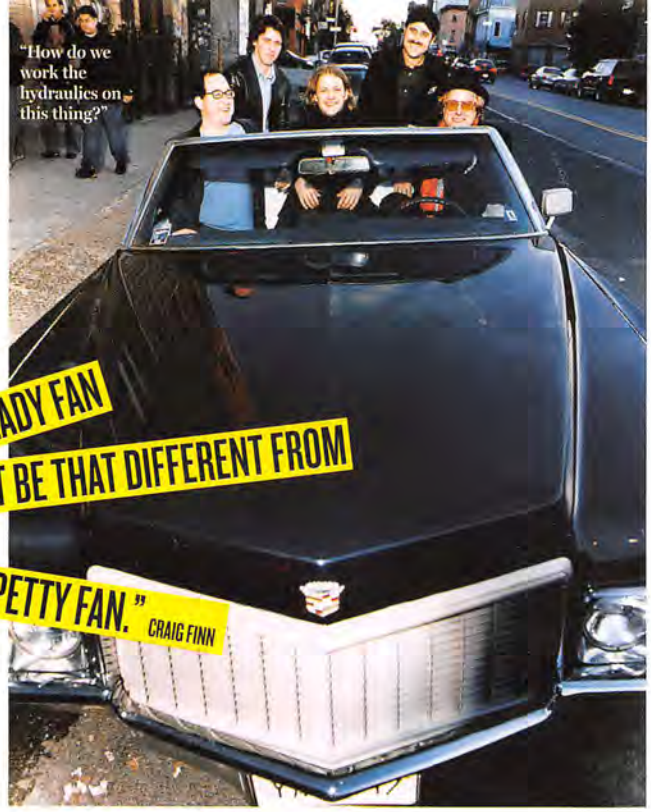
Name: SEAN GRIBBON
Age: 25
Occupation: Seventh-grade teacher
Favorite band: Beastie Boys
How often do you get confused with Craig Finn? Once. No, never.
If not Craig Finn, which famous person do people say you look like? Egon from *Ghostbusters*, but he got really fat.
How would you describe your look? Tall and dirty. LAUREN HARRIS

in a dorm room at the University of Wisconsin, things got a little weird. "My friend pulls out this gun, and he's like, 'Everybody strip down to your underwear. I wanna make sure nobody's wired.' I was like, This is gonna end so bad, and my parents are gonna be bummed out. I thought, Let's reassess what I'm doing here."

While Kubler tells *Blender* this story, his 2-year-old daughter is driving a tiny red car into another kid's tiny pink car. We're at a playground near Washington Square Park, a few blocks from Kubler and his girlfriend's apartment. There are advertisements for nannies and Chinese lessons on the bulletin board over by the swings. "I always see Julianne Moore and Philip Seymour Hoffman," says Kubler, who in a scarf, tinted sunglasses and a top hat is the model of an unobtrusively glam-y alterna-dad. "I think I'm the only parent at the park with a tattoo of a handgun."

Kubler, who left his native Wisconsin for Minneapolis soon after he gave up the acid business, has been playing music with Finn for about a decade. Their Minneapolis band Lifter Puller, a sort of postpunk pre–Hold Steady, rarely toured and developed a critical following only after they broke up in 2000. Kubler part-times as a photography assistant (sometimes on *Blender* shoots). Finn's last job before leaving Minneapolis for New York at age 30 was as a securities broker at American Express, where he was en route to a successful career ("To get promoted you had to pass exams. I'm really good at tests"). Finn, after performing a joke song called "Knuckles" as a "musical guest" on a fake talk show staged by improv comedy group the Upright Citizens Brigade, persuaded Kubler to move east in 2002, and they began setting Finn's rants to Kubler's taxonomical hesher-rock riffs vocab. Four years later, Kiefer Sutherland is turning up at their shows and they're on *Jimmy Kimmel Live* the same night as Don Rickles, a career-making moment to savor, especially when the Merchant of Venom glances at your beatnik-looking keyboard player and says, "What, did you guys bring your cabbie?"

"I don't own a TV," says Drake, who's been drumming in bands since his teens. "But when we started getting on TV, that's when my parents realized this was a job."


"How do we work the hydraulics on this thing?"

"BEING A HOLD STEADY FAN SHOULDN'T BE THAT DIFFERENT FROM BEING A TOM PETTY FAN." CRAIG FINN

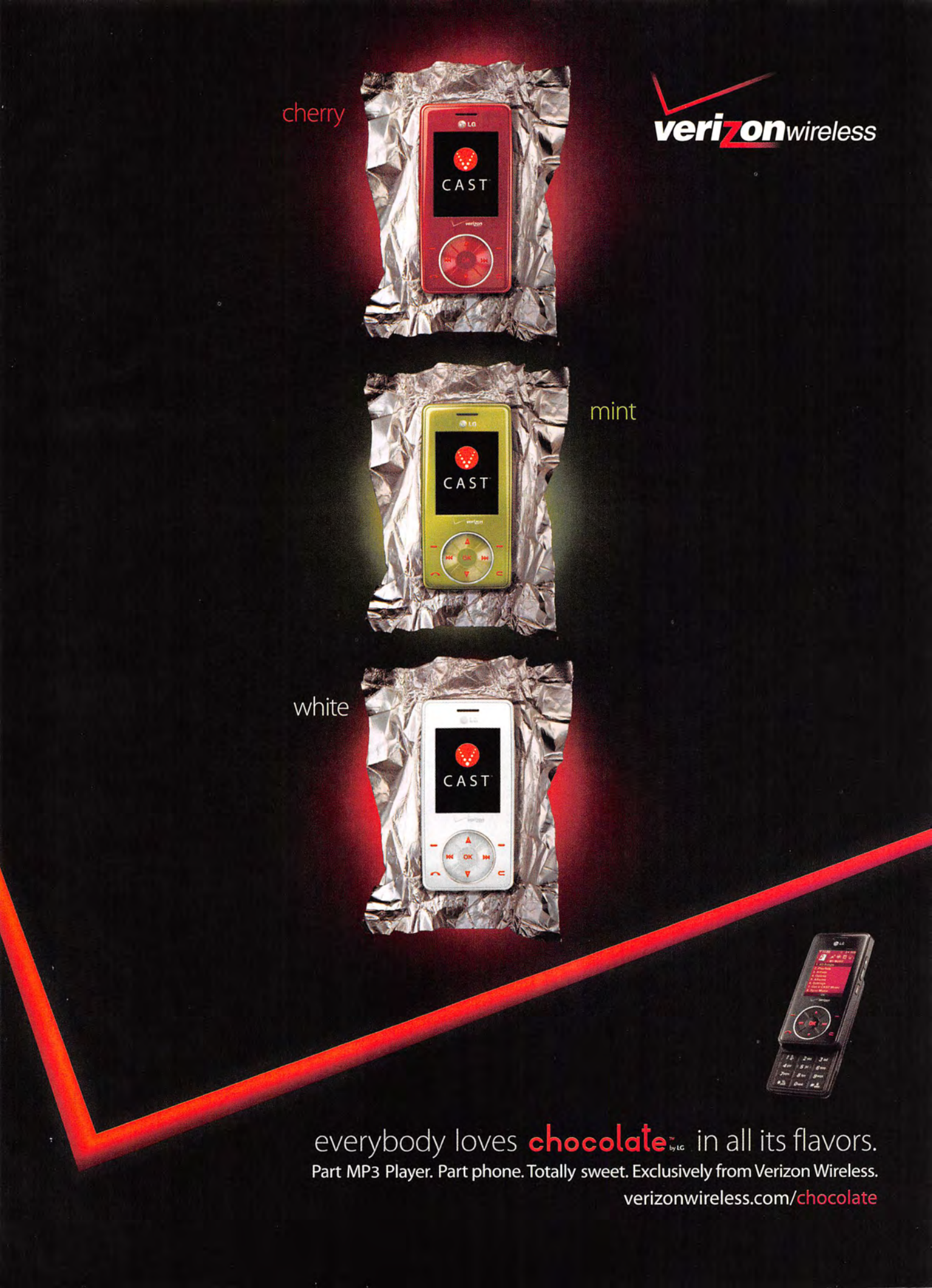
A RUN-IN WITH one of comedy's greatest pricks is indeed quite an experience. But there are heavier issues that weigh on the Hold Steady mind. "I hate the New York Yankees," Finn says. "So I went to Fenway Park and I bought this hat that says yh—Yankee Hater. But it looks exactly like a Yankees hat. I went to get some coffee in Detroit, while we were on tour, and this guy's like, 'I ought to kick you out for wearing that fuckin' Yankees hat,' and I was like, 'It says Yankee Haters.' But I stopped wearing it. He was right. It was ineffective. It didn't express what I was trying to do."

Likewise, Finn went out of his way on *Boys and Girls* to make his music more accessible, and it's the band's first album where they sound like a band on the radio in the '70s, not just a band that likes bands on the radio in the '70s. Still, to enjoy the Hold Steady, you have to enjoy getting honked at by a guy who isn't exactly Aretha Franklin when it comes to emotional nuance. ("The critical response we get has been amazing, but they always say, 'All this guy's doing is shouting'"). They aren't sure if their next album will further test Finn's incantatory aspirations. "It might take nine weeks—or nine days," Finn says.

One thing's for sure: He'd like his America to keep getting bigger. "I want to say things that are true," he explains. Lots of contemporary writers want to scratch the surface beneath our nation's Home Depot and Outback Steakhouse imperium. Finn does something else. He doesn't search for the "real" America, as fake now as the fake one, and he isn't telling the story of the myths beneath the malls; he's keeping alive the stories of those forgotten souls who spent Fridays puking in the suburban mall parking lots, making them classic rock like the misty mountains of Led Zeppelin or the thunder roads of Springsteen. Because one day the Man'll tear down the parking lot you puked in and put up paradise, and it probably won't look anything like paradise to you. "These guys came up to me after a show and they were like, 'Dude, we did the same things in Pittsburgh you did in Minneapolis.'" He stops to laugh. "I was like, 'Yeah, I know.'" [BLENDER]

Left: Finn represents his hometown. Below: Mackin' in the 11th grade.

TOP: KENNETH CAPPELLO; PERFORMANCE: AVIV SMALL/PHOTOPASS/ZUMA PRESS/NEWSCOM.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everybody loves chocolate by LG in all its flavors.
Part MP3 Player. Part phone. Totally sweet. Exclusively from Verizon Wireless.
verizonwireless.com/chocolate

100 (GREATEST SONGS OF 2006)

PREPARE YOUR IPODS AND READY YOUR ZUNES: FROM HIP-HOP BRAGFESTS TO POP ODES TO COED PROMISCUITY, THESE ARE THE SONGS YOU NEED TO MAKE YOUR YEAR-END PLAYLIST COMPLETE

Christina Aguilera: *So* ready for prom.

ELLEN VON UNWERTH

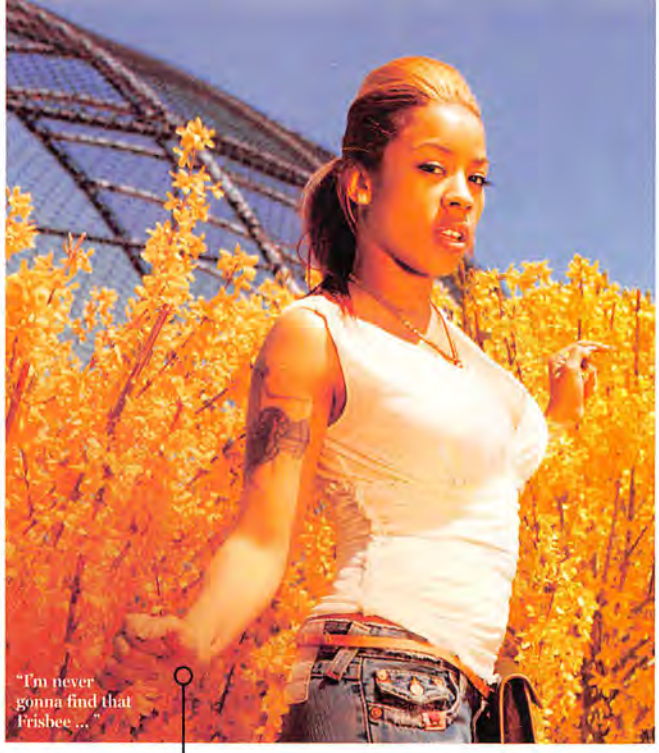
87

"LOVE"

KEYSHIA COLE

A TRIUMPHANT BALLAD THAT EARNED ITS PAIN

In 2001, an aspiring Oakland singer moved to L.A. in search of a career. Her CV wasn't stellar—its highlight was singing backup vocals for MC Hammer—but one night in 2005, clubbing in Malibu, inspiration struck: "I just wrote this song in the corner while everyone else was partying," Keyshia Cole says. "Love"—a pared-down ballad about the rush of first romance, featuring Cole's arresting vocal gymnastics—scored her a record deal. This year it shot to No. 3 on the R&B charts. For a former foster-home tough, though, the song was a challenge: "I'd been through so much, I was like, 'I don't wanna write a love song,'" she says, laughing. "Love hadn't been treating me too good!" *Jonah Weiner*



"I'm never gonna find that Frisbee ..."

100 "BAD DAY" DANIEL POWTER (WARNER BROS.)

99 "MEN & MASCARA" JULIE ROBERTS (MERCURY)

98 "HEARTBEATS" JOSÉ GONZÁLEZ (MUTE)

97 "CASH MACHINE" HARD-FI (NECESSARY/ATLANTIC)

96 "SWEET TEMPTATION" LILLIX (MAVERICK)

95 "SO SICK" NE-YO (DEF JAM)

94 "I'M SO SICK" FLYLEAF (J/OCTONE)

93 "THE FIRST SONG" BAND OF HORSES (SUB POP)

92 "SILENT SHOUT" THE KNIFE (MUTE)

91 "WOLFENSWAN" JAPANTHER (PLAN-IT-X)

90 "THE WAY I LIVE" BABY BOY FEAT. LIL BOOSIE (UNIVERSAL)

89 "DANI CALIFORNIA" RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS (WARNER BROS.)

88 "MISS MURDER" AFI (INTERSCOPE)

87 "LOVE" KEYSHIA COLE (A&M)

86 "A PUBLIC AFFAIR" JESSICA SIMPSON (EPIC)

85 "LEAVE THE PIECES" THE WRECKERS (WARNER BROS.)

84 "GETTIN' SOME" SHAWNNA (DISTURBING THA PEACE/DEF JAM)

83 "CHAIN HANG LOW" JIBBS (GEFFEN)

82 "GET DRUNK AND BE SOMEBODY" TOBY KEITH (SHOW DOG NASHVILLE)

81 "THE LONG WAY AROUND" DIXIE CHICKS (OPEN WIDE/COLUMBIA)

80 "YOU GOT AWAY WITH IT" TODD SNIDER (OPEN DOOR/UME)

79 "TOO LITTLE TOO LATE" JOJO (BLACKGROUND)

78 "YOUNG FOLKS" PETER BJORN AND JOHN (WICHITA)

77 "WALK AWAY" KELLY CLARKSON (RCA)

76 "WHITE AND NERDY" WEIRD AL YANKOVIC (VOLCANO)

75 "STAR WITNESS" NEKO CASE (ANTI-)

76

"WHITE AND NERDY"

WEIRD AL YANKOVIC

A WANKSTA ... AND PROUD OF IT!

Weird Al Yankovic has an architecture degree from Cal Poly. He's fluent in HTML. He graduated from high school at age 16—as the valedictorian. "I grew up playing the accordion," Yankovic says. "I've been doing research for 'White and Nerdy' my entire life." Yankovic decided to spoof Chamillionaire's "Ridin'" after hearing it "nonstop" on his local Top 40 station. From there it was just a matter of swapping lyrics about Hennessy and po-po for ones about Klingons, JavaScript and vector calculus. The parody gave Yankovic the first Top 10 hit of his 28-year career, winning the hearts of millions of AV-Clubbers, not to mention one Houston MC. "Chamillionaire was thrilled," Yankovic says. "He feels it's a sign of megastardom—he's got his platinum album, and now he's got his Weird Al parody." *Josh Eells*

"Don't make me discharge a cap in the direction of your posterior."

COLE: WENDY HOPE/CONTOURPHOTOS.COM; YANKOVIC: MICHAEL BLACKWELL

The Fray's pool luau: Unsuccessful.

66

"OVER MY HEAD (CABLE CAR)"

THE FRAY

DENVER PIANO-POP OUTFIT DEBUTS WITH A *NOW*-READY SMASH

Isaac Slade remembers exactly where he was the first time he heard his song on the radio. "We were at my parents' house in Denver," says the Fray frontman. "It was supposed to play at 9:05, but we couldn't get reception in the suburbs, so we had to all cram into my mom's minivan. It was very *That Thing You Do*." Slade wrote the much-soundtracked song a few years ago, during a falling-out with his brother Caleb. (They've since made up.) "It's sort of about weighing that friendship and deciding it's worth fighting for," Slade says. The title is also a cute inside joke: "Cable Car" is his brother's childhood nickname. "My sister-in-law still calls him that," Slade says. "It weirds me out." *Josh Eells*

"CONVENTIONAL WISDOM"	BUILT TO SPILL	(WARNER BROS.)	74
"PHANTOM LIMB"	THE SHINS	(SUB POP)	73
"WHEN YOUR HEART STOPS BEATING"	(+44)	(INTERSCOPE)	72
"PUT YOUR RECORDS ON"	CORINNE BAILEY RAE	(CAPITOL)	71
"DEAR MR. SUPERCOMPUTER"	SUFJAN STEVENS	(ASTHMATIC KITTY)	70
"SAY I"	CHRISTINA MILIAN FEAT. YOUNG JEEZY	(ISLAND)	69
"LONDON BRIDGE"	FERGIE	(INTERSCOPE)	68
"TAKE ME BACK TO YOUR HOUSE"	BASEMENT JAXX	(XL/BEGGARS)	67
"OVER MY HEAD (CABLE CAR)"	THE FRAY	(EPIC)	66
"SPORTSCENTER"	LIL WAYNE	(GANGSTA GRILLZ)	65
"S.O.S."	EARL GREYHOUND	(SOME)	64
"SMILE"	LILY ALLEN	(REGAL)	63
"INSISTOR"	TAPES 'N TAPES	(XL/BEGGARS)	62
"GET SET"	LOW DEEP	(VICE)	61
"SOS"	RIHANNA	(DEF JAM)	60
"BEANBAG CHAIR"	YO LA TENGO	(MATADOR)	59
"DO IT TO IT"	CHERISH	(CAPITOL)	58
"GET UP"	CIARA FEAT. CHAMILLIONAIRE	(LA FACE)	57
"ENTOURAGE"	OMARION	(T.U.G./EPIC/SONY URBAN MUSIC)	56
"IT'S GOIN' DOWN"	YUNG JOC	(BAD BOY SOUTH/ATLANTIC)	55
"BEEP"	THE PUSSYCAT DOLLS	(A&M)	54
"STEADY, AS SHE GOES"	THE RACONTEURS	(XL/BEGGARS)	53
"MORRIS BROWN"	OUTKAST	(LA FACE/ZOMBA)	52
"U + UR HAND"	PINK	(LA FACE/JIVE)	51
"HIS HANDS"	CANDI STATON	(ASTRALWERKS)	50
"PUT EM IN THEIR PLACE"	MOBB DEEP	(G-UNIT/INTERSCOPE)	49

It's OK, we really don't need to frisk you. Thanks, though.

68

"LONDON BRIDGE"

FERGIE

BLACK EYED PEAS SINGER FILLS HER "STUPID" HIT WITH *SHIT*

Fergie, do you know how many times the word shit *appears in your song "London Bridge"?* She shrugs. "A thousand?" *Almost. Thirty-two times.* "That's awesome!" There's a clean version of her first solo hit, but "I'm all about the bad version," she chuckles. When producer Polow Da Don played the track, she liked it but asked him what the lyrics should be about. "Just you being the shit," he suggested. "So we were just as dumb as we wanted to be," she explains, perhaps thinking about the line "I'm such a lady, but I'm dancin' like a ho." "It was one of those stupid moments that ends up brilliant," she says. Of course, superstars always have to contend with the hatas: "My dad said it was the worst song he'd ever heard in his life." *Rob Tannenbaum*

FRAY: CHAPMAN BAEHLER; FERGIE: MATT DOYLE/CONTOURPHOTOS.COM.

HOW I DID IT

"I WRITE SINS NOT TRAGEDIES"

PANIC! AT THE DISCO

30

LAS VEGAS EYELINER QUARTET WRITES THE YEAR'S STRANGEST BREAKUP JAM

In spring 2005, something normal happened: A sensitive kid split up with his girlfriend and wrote a song about it. But Ryan Ross, guitarist and P!ATD lyricist, decided to refract his breakup through the story of a groom who overhears that his bride is "a whore"—on his wedding day. "It was written like, 'Things could be worse,'" Ross recalls. He wrote the lyrics first, leaving singer Brendon Urie to squeeze what Ross calls his "short story" into meter. The band set the whole thing to a jerky mix of cello, guitar and vibraphone, creating what Ross proudly calls "one of the weirdest songs on the record." Not *too* weird. "Sins," released in January 2006, reached No. 7 on the pop chart. *Jonah Weiner*

48 "THROW SOME D'S" RICH BOY FEAT. POLOW DA DON (ZONE 4/INTERSCOPE)

47 "I DON'T FEEL LIKE DANCING" SCISSOR SISTERS (UNIVERSAL)

46 "BLACK SWEAT" PRINCE (UNIVERSAL)

45 "O VALENCIA!" THE DECEMBERISTS (CAPITOL)

44 "SKRUNG OWT" FAM-LAY (STAR TRAK/INTERSCOPE)

43 "BE WITHOUT YOU" MARY J. BLIGE (GEFFEN)

42 "VANS" THE PACK (UP ALL NIGHT/JIVE)

41 "YOU ONLY LIVE ONCE" THE STROKES (RCA)

40 "WHOO! ALRIGHT-YEAH ... UH HUH" THE RAPTURE (UNIVERSAL)

39 "DIMENSION" WOLFMOTHER (MODULAR/INTERSCOPE)

38 "BLACK HORSE AND THE CHERRY TREE" KT TUNSTALL (VIRGIN)

37 "HANG ME UP TO DRY" COLD WAR KIDS (DOWNTOWN)

36 "STRASBOURG" THE RAKES (DIM MAK/V2)

35 "PEANUT BUTTER & JELLY" CADILLAC DON AND J MONEY (ASYLUM)

34 "YOU HAVE KILLED ME" MORRISSEY (SANCTUARY)

33 "GHETTO STORY" CHAM (VP/ATLANTIC)

32 "LOVE ME OR HATE ME" LADY SOVEREIGN (DEF JAM)

31 "AIN'T NO OTHER MAN" CHRISTINA AGUILERA (RCA)

30 "I WRITE SINS NOT TRAGEDIES" PANIC! AT THE DISCO (FUELED BY RAMEN)

29 "RUSH" ALY & AJ (HOLLYWOOD)

28 "KNIGHTS OF CYDONIA" MUSE (WARNER BROS.)

27 "MAKEDAMNSURE" TAKING BACK SUNDAY (WARNER BROS.)

26 "SAVE ROOM" JOHN LEGEND (G.O.O.D./COLUMBIA/SONY URBAN MUSIC)

25 "TRILL" CLIPSE (RE-UP/JIVE)

24 "TELL ME WHEN TO GO" E-40 FEAT. KEAK DA SNEAK (WARNER BROS.)

23 "FIDELITY" REGINA SPEKTOR (SIRE)

22 WILDCAT RATATAT (XL/BEGGARS GROUP)

"TELL ME WHEN TO GO"

E-40 FEAT. KEAK DA SNEAK

WELCOME TO HYPHY 101

"Tell Me When to Go" was one of 2006's strangest radio hits: a spare concoction of weird sound effects and gulping rhymes that carried the banner for the Bay Area hip-hop movement called hyphy. "Hyphy is a lifestyle," says Oakland's E-40. "Cats wilding out, acting a fool. We just tried to spit as much of it as we could." The song, produced by Lil Jon, introduced listeners to slang like "ghost-riding the whip," wherein a motorist slows his car to a crawl and dances alongside it. ("It's not recommended if you need a wheel alignment," E-40 notes.) It also gave him one of the biggest hits of his 20-year career. "The world needs me right now," he says. "The rap game without E-40 is like old people without bingo." *Josh Eells*

24

"Who's up for some huntin'?"

PANIC! AT THE DISCO: JASON NOCITO; E-40: TONY AVELAR/AP PHOTO.

"WHEN YOU WERE YOUNG"
THE KILLERS

EIGHTIES-LOVIN' POMP-ROCKERS INVOKE THE BOSS AND JESUS

Brandon Flowers remembers sitting in the Killers' rehearsal space in Las Vegas, hearing for the first time the churning riff that would form *Sam's Town*'s lead single. "It was like walking through a field and stepping on something that sparkles," he recalls. Though this wide-screen, metaphor-heavy opus about getting outta Dodge owes a thematic debt to Springsteen, it was another '80s icon who inspired its most enduring melodic flourish. "I heard 'White Wedding' while running one day," says Flowers. "And even though I thought our song was the bee's knees, we had to add a guitar line like that." But here's what everyone wants to know: Have you ever burned down the highway skyline on the back of a hurricane? "I know, hurricanes don't burn, but I'm allowed to have my fantasies." *Steve Kandell*

"Bow before us, puny mortals!"

"HUSTLIN'" — RICK ROSS (DEF JAM) — 21

"45:33" — LCD SOUNDSYSTEM (NIKE) — 20

"WE FLY HIGH" — JIM JONES (KOCH) — 19

"WOLF LIKE ME" — TV ON THE RADIO (INTERSCOPE) — 18

"THE BIG GUNS" — JENNY LEWIS (TEAM LOVE) — 17

"J.E.E.Z.Y." — YOUNG JEEZY (DEF JAM) — 16

"CALL ME WHEN YOU'RE SOBER" — EVANESCENCE (WIND-UP) — 15

"OVER AND OVER" — HOT CHIP (DFA/ASTRALWERKS) — 14

"RING THE ALARM" — BEYONCÉ (COLUMBIA/SONY URBAN MUSIC) — 13

"CHILLOUT TENT" — THE HOLD STEADY (VAGRANT) — 12

"ME & U" — CASSIE (BAD BOY) — 11

"ALL OF THE ABOVE" — BIG CITY ROCK (ATLANTIC) — 10

"I BET YOU LOOK GOOD ON THE DANCEFLOOR" — ARCTIC MONKEYS (DOMINO) — 9

"WELCOME TO THE BLACK PARADE" — MY CHEMICAL ROMANCE (REPRISE) — 8

"RIDIN'" — CHAMILLIONAIRE (UNIVERSAL) — 7

"CHEATED HEARTS" — YEAH YEAH YEAHS (INTERSCOPE) — 6

"WHEN YOU WERE YOUNG" — THE KILLERS (ISLAND) — 5

"PROMISCUOUS" — NELLY FURTADO (GEFFEN) — 4

"MY LOVE" — JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE FEAT. T.I. (JIVE) — 3

"WHAT YOU KNOW" — T.I. (GRAND HUSTLE/ATLANTIC) — 2

"CRAZY" — GNARLS BARKLEY (DOWNTOWN) — 1

"PROMISCUOUS"
NELLY FURTADO

THUMPING DUET MATCHES A COY GIRL WITH AN INSISTENT PLAYA

In the studio one day, Timbaland began crooning the phrase "promiscuous girl" to Nelly Furtado. It wasn't an accusation; it was the start of one of the year's best hooks. It was also an accident. "I don't think he really knew what it meant," she says, laughing. "He probably thought *promiscuous* meant *sexy*." Furtado and a Southern rapper named Attitude wrote the teasing back-and-forth verses, "flirting together while we wrote," she says, "which is why the song is so playful." It spent six weeks at No. 1 over the summer, the longest run since Kanye West's "Gold Digger." It's not about sex, but about "verbal foreplay," Furtado says. "Tim and I called it 'The BlackBerry Song,' because everything we say in the song you could text-message to somebody." So do the boy and girl hook up, or what? "I think we should do a sequel," Furtado chirps. *Rob Tannenbaum*

THE KILLERS: PEROU; FURTADO: ROBERTO D'ESTE/CORBIS OUTLINE.

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ELITE 8

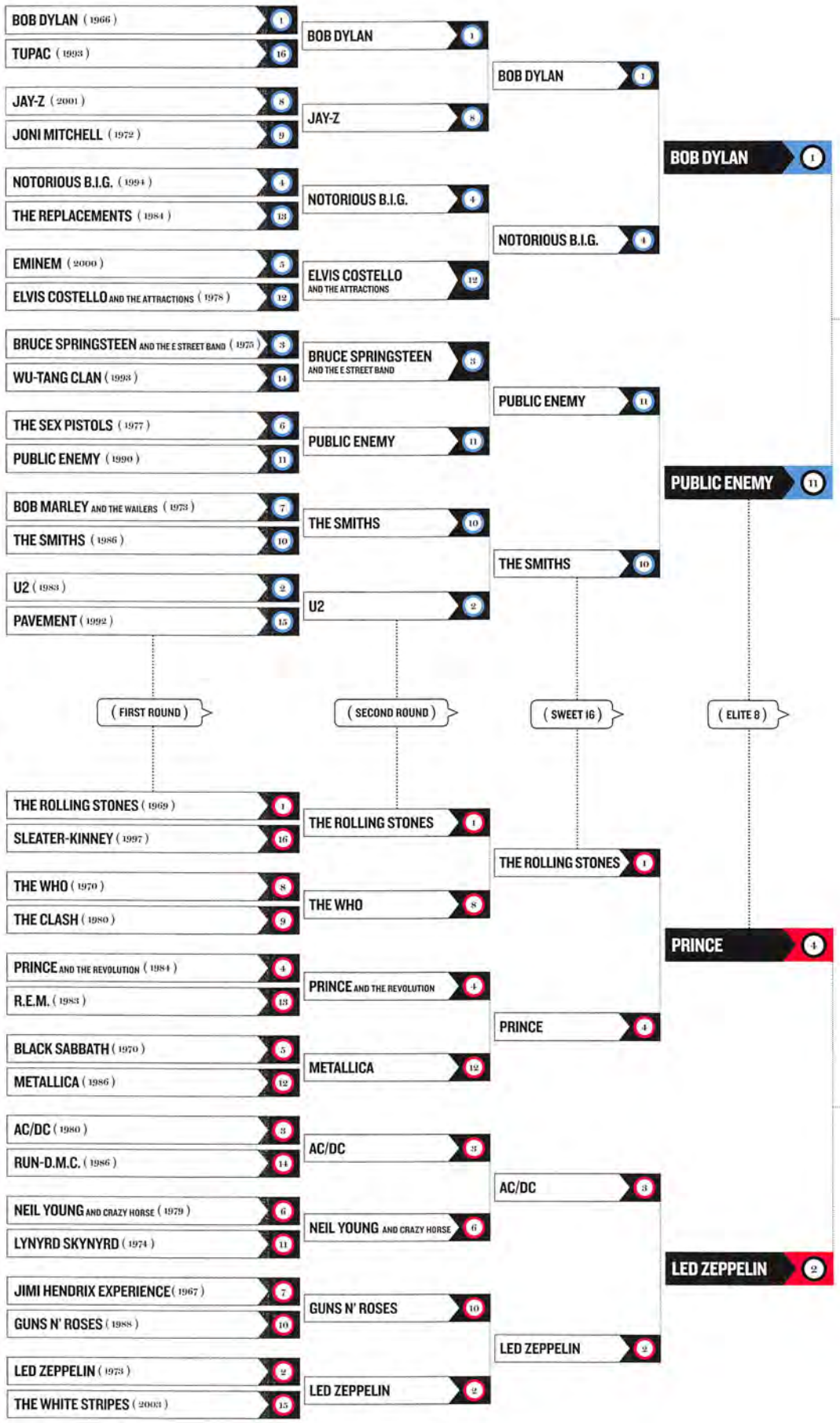
ROCK STAR WARS

THE ULTIMATE TOURNAMENT!

OVER THREE ROUNDS, AMPS HAVE BEEN SMASHED, DIVAS HAVE BEEN TRAMPLED AND MICK JAGGER HAS BEEN PIMP-SLAPPED. WHO ARE THE EIGHT ACTS STILL STANDING? DON YOUR PROTECTIVE GOGGLES, READ ON AND FIND OUT ...

By Jon Dolan and Douglas Wolk

TURN PAGE AND LIFT FLAP FOR FULL TOURNEY BREAKDOWN!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JAY-Z (2001) 8
JONI MITCHELL (1972) 9
NOTORIOUS B.I.G. (1994) 4
THE REPLACEMENTS (1984) 13
EMINEM (2000) 5
ELVIS COSTELLO AND THE ATTRACTIONS (1978) 12
BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN AND THE E STREET BAND (1975) 3
WU-TANG CLAN (1993) 14
THE SEX PISTOLS (1977) 6
PUBLIC ENEMY (1990) 11
BOB MARLEY AND THE WAILERS (1973) 7
THE SMITHS (1986) 10
U2 (1983) 2
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BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN AND THE E STREET BAND 3
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THE SMITHS 10
U2 2
BOB DYLAN 1
NOTORIOUS B.I.G. 4
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THE SMITHS 10
BOB DYLAN 1
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(SWEET 16)
(ELITE 8)
(FINAL 4)
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AC/DC (1980) 3
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LYNYRD SKYNYRD (1974) 11
JIMI HENDRIX EXPERIENCE (1967) 7
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THE WHO 8
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METALLICA 12
AC/DC 3
NEIL YOUNG AND CRAZY HORSE 6
GUNS N' ROSES 10
LED ZEPPELIN 2
THE ROLLING STONES 1
PRINCE 4
AC/DC 3
LED ZEPPELIN 2
PRINCE 4
LED ZEPPELIN 2

ROCK STAR WARS

WORDS (Sweet 16 Results)

1 BOB DYLAN (1966) vs. 4 NOTORIOUS B.I.G. (1994)

DOUGLAS WOLK: Both are downright mean mofos who inspired hundreds if not thousands of imitators. But here's the thing: Dylan blew every mind within a thousand-mile radius in '66, but he's still sort of an acquired taste. You drop 16 bars of Biggie '94 into any record even now and the energy goes up about a million percent.

JON DOLAN: Yeah but, um, IT'S DYLAN. He invented the loose, cryptic stem-winding spiel that everybody emulates. In fact, it's tough to imagine Biggie's internal rhymes and hilarious inside jokes if Dylan hadn't blown down the door with his .44 back in '66 and made the lyrics the show, not just the singer or the song.

DOUGLAS: Hard to argue with that. But here's one more argument in Biggie's favor: Dylan created a whole branch of rock, but Smalls changed the entire course of hip-hop, from flow to beats to subject matter to the way rappers handle their personae.

JON: I'm sorry, I couldn't hear you over the guitars on *The Bootleg Series Vol. 4: Live 1966*.

DOUGLAS: That's actually another advantage Bob's got here: His '66 bands were smoking, and the best thing that can be said about Biggie's '94 production is that it stayed out of his way.

AND THE WINNER IS: **BOB DYLAN**

10 THE SMITHS (1986) vs. 11 PUBLIC ENEMY (1990)

JON: In the late '80s, Public Enemy radicalized rap just as it was becoming mainstream. Can anyone today bring the fury like the Bomb Squad on *Fear of a Black Planet*? It's hard to imagine a moaning cemetery stalker like Morrissey giving 'em much of a scare.

DOUGLAS: Moaning stalkers? You've just described the entire emo world, all of whom bow down before their Mancunian master. And let's not forget Johnny Marr quietly reinvented the sound of rock guitar. If their radicalism was social instead of political, it wasn't less significant than PE's, and it probably had a more lasting effect on pop.

JON: It's hard to blame PE for the shallowness of today's hip-hop. That's like blaming Abe Lincoln for Mark Foley.

DOUGLAS: At the same time, you can't blame the Smiths for the whiny disciples who didn't catch on to how flipping hilarious they were. But what Chuck D had that Morrissey didn't was a foil to his lyrical persona like Flavor Flav. And the fact that PE didn't really influence much of anybody—because nobody else was willing to work that hard on their production—means that *Black Planet* still sounds relevant.

AND THE WINNER IS: **PUBLIC ENEMY**

ELITE 8 PREVIEW

1 BOB DYLAN (1966)
vs.
11 PUBLIC ENEMY (1990)

DOUGLAS: Jesus, this one's tough. But I do admire the fact that everybody was terrifi of Public Enemy in 1990.

JON: It comes down to the lyrics, where Dylan has an edge.

DOUGLAS: Attitude, too. PE was selling a carefully thought-out revolution, and Dyl just closed his eyes and floored it.

JON: Maybe Dylan shouldn't have recorded "Rainy Day Women #12 & 35," though. That "everybody must get stoned stuff is wack.

RIFFS (Sweet 16 Results)

1 THE ROLLING STONES (1969) vs. 4 PRINCE AND THE REVOLUTION (1984)

JON: It's hard to imagine today, since the Stones are sponsored by Ameriquest, but in 1969 they were the devil incarnate: five bad, bad dudes. They had a ton of good years, but '69 combined awesome (*Let It Bleed*) and crazy (Brian Jones dying). Prince can play some guitar and Wendy and Lisa are fine, but he's gonna be a little purple puddle when Mick gets through with him.

DOUGLAS: I gotta quote critic Robert Christgau on Prince here: "Mick Jagger should fold up his penis and go home." Prince '84? Scary enough that "Darling Nikki" inspired Tipper Gore to create the PMRC; awesome enough to have made the freshest single of that year, "When Doves Cry."

JON: "Gimme Shelter" slammed the door on the '60s; "You Can't Always Get What You Want" inaugurated the '70s. The heroin! The death! The cowbell on "Honky Tonk Woman"!

DOUGLAS: The Purple One in his prime was the most sex-drenched entity that's ever played music. He didn't just dance around the wall between rock and R&B, he atomized it and then turned its final collapse into a beat. Plus, I don't think anyone scores points for heroin and death.

AND THE WINNER IS: **PRINCE**

2 LED ZEPPELIN (1973) vs. 3 AC/DC (1980)

DOUGLAS: *Back in Black* is the gold standard for hard-rock albums—it still sounds good 26 years later, and *Zep IV* is maybe starting to be a little fusty around the edges.

JON: Here's a thought: AC/DC did one thing (so-dumb-it's-genius riffage), but Zep did 50 things (they married hippie folk and brimstone metal, made elves and hobbits cool and had the best rock drummer ever).

DOUGLAS: Fox vs. hedgehog. *Zep IV* definitely has a wider variety of great individual moments—that Little Richard drum riff at the beginning of "Rock and Roll," Sandy Denny's wail on "The Battle of Evermore," the slow-mo pile driver of "When the Levee Breaks"—and Page and Plant, unlike the Young brothers, favor evoking history and mystery, not just removing panties. On the other hand, Bonham might have the drummer crown, but AC/DC's got the best rhythm section: They're a band, not a collection of showoffs. "Stairway to Heaven" is a guitar-store cliché in 2006; "You Shook Me All Night Long" is just a party-starter.

Jon: True, "Stairway" is pretty tough to get through, but if AC/DC tried to play "Black Dog," Angus would soil his schoolboy shorts.

AND THE WINNER IS: **LED ZEPPELIN**

ELITE 8 PREVIEW

2 LED ZEPPELIN (1973)
vs.
4 PRINCE (1984)

JON: Prince in '84 was still hungry, where Zep were getting a little smug in their brilliance. Plus, Zep are ripping off the blues to change rock; Prince is reinventing blac music, rock and Top 40 at the same time. Upset brewing?

DOUGLAS: Could be. Don't count out Jimmy Page's powerful Crowleyan magic though—Zep augments their riffcraft with actual witchcraft.

NEXT MONTH:
ELITE 8 RESULTS, FINAL 4 PREVIEW

PREVIOUS PAGE: DYLAN: JERRY SCHATZBERG/CORBIS; LED ZEPPELIN: NEAL PRESTON/CORBIS; NIRVANA: FRANK MICELOTTA/GETTY IMAGES; PUBLIC ENEMY: ANDY CATLIN/LFI; TALKING HEADS: JOE BANGAY/LFI; PRESLEY: PICTORIAL PRESS. THIS PAGE: DYLAN: VAL WILMER/REDFERNS/RETNA LTD; PRINCE: SCOTT WEINER/RETNA LTD.

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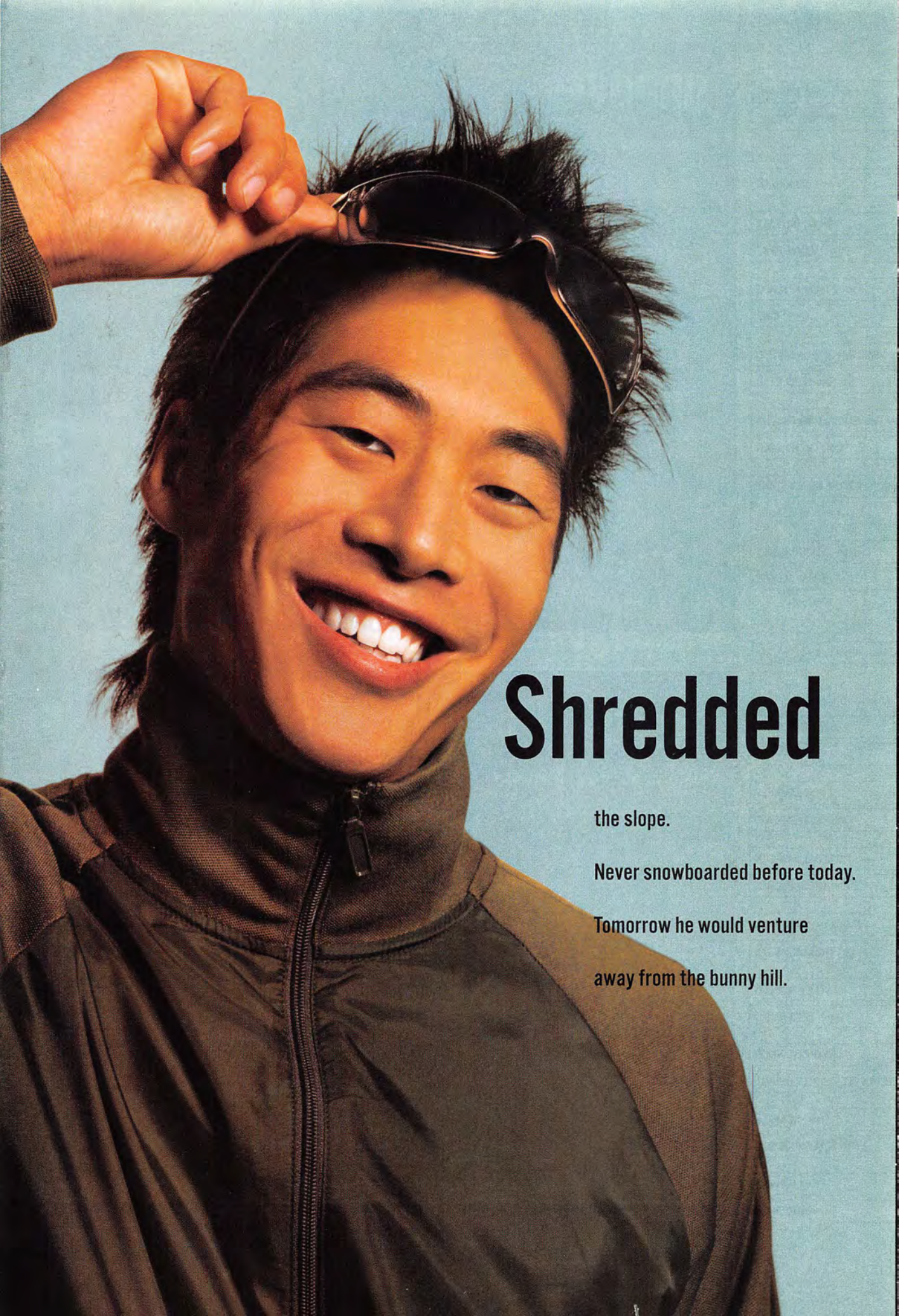

Shredded
the slope.
Never snowboarded before today.
Tomorrow he would venture
away from the bunny hill.

(1970) JAMES BROWN
(2000) BRITNEY SPEARS
(1989) BEASTIE BOYS
(2000) RADIOHEAD
(2000) OUTKAST
(2004) KANYE WEST
(1980) TALKING HEADS
(1979) CHIC
977) PARLIAMENT/FUNKADELIC
(1973) GRATEFUL DEAD
9) THE VELVET UNDERGROUND
(1983) NEW ORDER
1969) SLY & THE FAMILY STONE
(1989) DE LA SOUL
(1956) ELVIS PRESLEY
(2001) MISSY ELLIOTT

(FIRST ROUND)

(1964) THE BEATLES
(1976) KISS
(1977) RAMONES
(1972) DAVID BOWIE
(1983) MICHAEL JACKSON
(1965) THE SUPREMES
(1985) MADONNA
(1966) THE BEACH BOYS
(1972) STEVIE WONDER
(1973) ROXY MUSIC
(1967) ARETHA FRANKLIN
EDENCE CLEARWATER REVIVAL
(1972) AL GREEN
(1977) FLEETWOOD MAC
(1991) NIRVANA
(2004) GREEN DAY

GROOVES (Sweet 16 Results)

1 JAMES BROWN (1970) vs. 5 TALKING HEADS (1980)

DOUGLAS: I have to say, Jon, that Mr. Brown looks very hard to beat here. Nineteen-seventy was maybe the funkiest year of the Godfather's career, the year of "Funky Drummer," "Sex Machine," "Super Bad," "It's a New Day" and "Brother Rapp," and the year he was being backed up by Bootsy and Catfish Collins. He dances better, too.

JON: Admittedly, no James Brown means no Talking Heads. His break beats provide the root of all punk-funk jamming. And yet the Heads added so much more—Afrobeat from Fela Kuti, aggro noise courtesy of CBGB, splashes of ambient exotica courtesy of producer Brian Eno. No one's gonna say Tina Weymouth can touch Bootsy, but she's pretty fly for a white girl.

DOUGLAS: As far as singing goes, Byrne's big trick is making the most of a weedy, neurotic little voice that has exactly none of the Godfather's authority and fire.

JON: That said, while James Brown was certifiably nuts, few have investigated modern psychosis like Byrne on *Remain in Light*. The Heads worked the brain just as hard as J.B. worked the body—and they were pretty physical themselves, too.

AND THE WINNER IS: **TALKING HEADS**

2 ELVIS PRESLEY (1956) vs. 3 PARLIAMENT/FUNKADELIC (1977)

JON: It's almost hard to see the Skinny '50s Elvis through the massive drug- and peanut-butter-and-banana-sandwich-gorged ass of the Fat '70s Elvis, but he was the pinnacle of awesome. Prince, Mick Jagger and, yes, George Clinton can't get down like the kid from Tupelo. He changed history with one hip sway; his lip curl made teenage girls put aside their homework and go join razor-blade-wielding street gangs.

DOUGLAS: Here's the thing, though: The reason you'd want to see Elvis '56 now is because he's historically important (maybe as historically important as they come, it's true). The reason you'd want to see P-Funk '77 now is because they were totally goddamn amazing.

JON: What makes Elvis amazing is that he had the total package before anyone knew what it should be—he moved his ass, he looked cool in black, his voice reflected R&B and honky-tonk, he seemed tough but sweet. Even today, people can't get that formula.

DOUGLAS: It's true—people who claim Elvis as a progenitor usually just fake his vocal tics, instead of his incredible breadth of taste and interpretive range. And absolutely everything he touched in 1956 was a landmark.

AND THE WINNER IS: **ELVIS PRESLEY**

ELITE 8 PREVIEW

2 ELVIS PRESLEY (1956)
vs.
5 TALKING HEADS (1980)

DOUGLAS: I still say Talking Heads' victory was a lucky blow, and the Providence art-school crowd is going to have to kneel before the King—even though he screams "oldies" nowadays, while the Heads are modern-rock radio staples.

JON: It's gonna be tough for the Heads, but if you can judge a band by the mass of artists they influence, they may be the best band of the last 30 years. They feel alive right now. Elvis, not so much.

TUNES (Sweet 16 Results)

1 THE BEATLES (1964) vs. 5 MADONNA (1985)

DOUGLAS: As far as music goes, if anybody's gonna unseat Beatles '64 in this division, it's probably not going to be Madonna. But pop isn't just about sound, it's about image and impact. Both of which the Beatles beat Ms. Ciccone at, too, although she puts up a good fight.

JON: Madonna's sound fused teeny-bop fun and sexual mystery, and it grew up a lot of girls too fast, including Britney, Xtina, etc.

DOUGLAS: Of course, you could apply the fun/sexual, mystery/growing-up-too-fast template just as easily to the guys who wanted to hold the hands of girls who were "... just 17/You know what I mean." Still, maybe Madonna has a superior command of the televised image? No, no, there's the whole *The Ed Sullivan Show* thing. Better stage show? Well, you could actually hear her over the screaming. Better clothing sense? She wins that one, OK.

JON: Well, anybody would rather look at Madonna than George Harrison (women included). She can dance, and they never really tried. That said, even Ringo is a better singer than Madge. Madonna's career ended up being better longer. In their prime, though, the Beatles are untouchable.

AND THE WINNER IS: **THE BEATLES**

2 NIRVANA (1991) vs. 6 ARETHA FRANKLIN (1967)

JON: As singers go, Aretha would blow Kurt away like a big soul monsoon. And Krist Novoselic and Dave Grohl might be heavy, but the Muscle Shoals guys backing Aretha could go from kicking your ass to melting your heart. Plus, Aretha wasn't a self-abusing mutant.

DOUGLAS: Dude, the whole point of Kurt was that he was a self-abusing mutant—Aretha's a craftier and deeper singer, but his voice had more raw electric power than anyone ever. And *Nevermind* was the radio-friendly paradigm shifter that instantly changed the sound of rock. Fuck "subtle," you know?

JON: Nirvana changed radio. "Respect" changed America—it gave feminism a soulful anthem, helped key black power and got mighty whitey dancing, too.

DOUGLAS: "Respect" is a terrific record, no question, but it didn't change America on its own—it wasn't the first feminist pop No. 1 (that would be "These Boots Are Made for Walkin'") or even the first hit version of that song (Otis Redding). A country without it would be a bummer, but other people were working similar territory. A world without "Smells Like Teen Spirit"—now, that would suck.

AND THE WINNER IS: **NIRVANA**

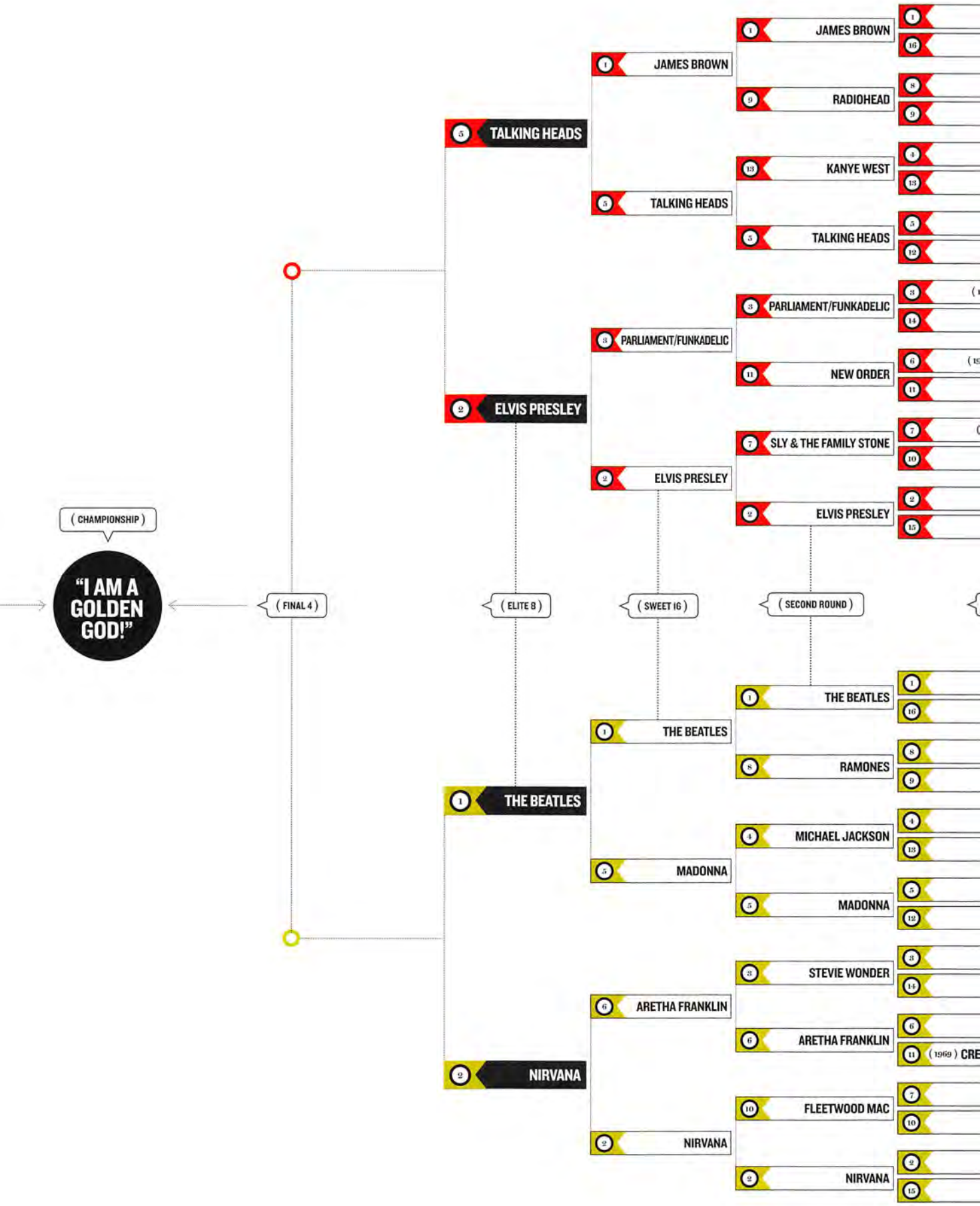
ELITE 8 PREVIEW

1 THE BEATLES (1964)
vs.
2 NIRVANA (1991)

JON: John Lennon and Kurt Cobain: There's a green room from hell. The Beatles invented the idea of bitter and pop-y, so they get the edge in my book.

DOUGLAS: Nirvana didn't invent much, they just apotheosized "bitter and pop-y and really, really loud"—and they had a deliberate wimp strain at least as wide as the Fab Four's. The dust from their impact is still settling, although arguably so is the dust from the Beatles' impact.

PRESLEY: MICHAELOCHSARCHIVES.COM; NIRVANA: JESSE FROHMAN/CORBIS OUTLINE.


(CHAMPIONSHIP)
"I AM A GOLDEN GOD!"
(FINAL 4)
(ELITE 8)
(SWEET 16)
(SECOND ROUND)
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2 ELVIS PRESLEY
1 THE BEATLES
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5 MADONNA
6 ARETHA FRANKLIN
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11 NEW ORDER
7 SLY & THE FAMILY STONE
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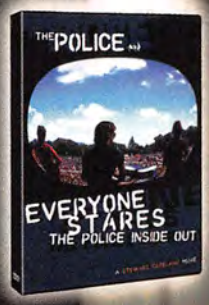

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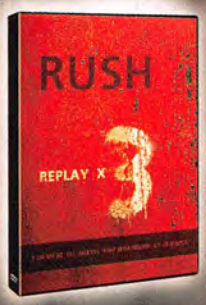

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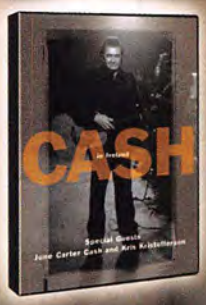

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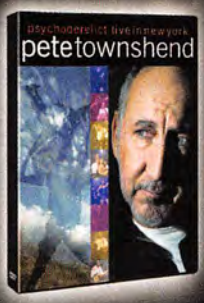
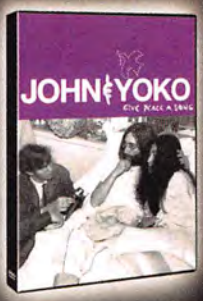
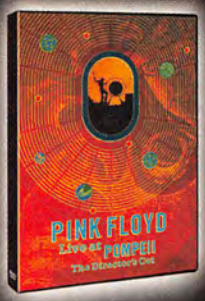


PETE TOWNSHEND
PSYCHODERELICT LIVE IN NEW YORK



JOHN & YOKO
GIVE PEACE A SONG



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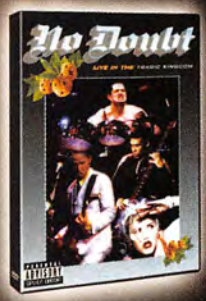

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THE GUIDE

THEY MAKE 'EM. WE REVIEW 'EM

Jay-Z: "Does this Yankees cap make my pinkie ring look gaudy?"

HEAVEN CAN WAIT

SUDDENLY "UNRETIRED," JAY-HOVA SEEMS LESS GODLY THAN EVER

JAY-Z

KINGDOM COME ✪✪✪

DEF JAM

DON'T CALL IT a comeback—that term implies a return from prison, or a reality-TV show, or somewhere else undesirable. Since "retiring" in 2004 to become the president and CEO of Def Jam Recordings, the Brooklyn rapper turned pop star turned mogul has enjoyed the kind of opulent life unimaginable to anyone old enough to remember when hip-hop was too black for

JAY-Z: ANTHONY MANDLER. STEFANI: TPF/RETNA CELEBS/RETNA LTD.; YOUNG JEEZY: JONATHAN MANNION. FLAVOR FLAV: JASON MERRITT/FILMMAGIC.COM.

MTV. Today, pitching laptops and beer and luxury goods, touring the globe with the blessing of the U.N. and fast approaching 40, Jay embodies a brave new world of possibilities. We know where he's been; the question is where he's going—and, after listening to his ninth studio album, whether we care to follow.

Kingdom Come might be the most anticipated album in the history of hip-hop. Jay's moving and eloquent farewell, *The Black Album*, represented the genre's last truly *national* moment, and his profile has only grown since then. Expectations are impossibly high, and there are moments when he justifies the kingdom's faith. On "The Prelude," one of his strongest openers, Jay vows to raise his hustle to new heights, over lush, gliding strings. He comes across as strikingly mature on the unabashedly frank "Lost Ones" and "Do U Wanna Ride," drastically improving on the gangster-with-feelings template that generally passes for rap introspection.

Stifling the rubber-band funk of Rick James to a noisy sputter, the Just Blaze–produced title song is a classic Jay swaggerfest: "Not only N-Y-C—I'm hip-hop's savior/So after this flow you might owe me a favor." Yet the responsibilities of age tug at his conscience, something he's alluded to in the past. "There's much bigger issues in the world, I know/But I first had to take care of the world I know," he explains. Throughout *Kingdom Come*, it's unclear what his world looks like nowadays.

Jay retired as nothing less than a folk hero—his ascension from the Marcy Projects to Madison Square Garden was unprecedented. But he never quite rises to this lofty occasion, and without anything to prove other than that he can come back whenever he pleases, he reverts to gloating. It's difficult to relate to this victory lap, as Jay laments the oppressiveness of the boardroom or the difficult choice between the "bright watch" and the "right watch." When he opens the fame-loving "Hollywood" by smirking, "It ain't for everybody," it's unclear whether he's talking about the city or the feather-light mutual-backslaps duet with Beyoncé.

WITH NOTHING TO PROVE, JAY REVERTS TO GLOATING.

Given the consistency of *The Black Album*, it's a surprise that *Kingdom Come* most resembles his inconsistent mid-'90s albums: "Minority Report," a toothless commentary on Katrina-stricken New Orleans, follows the punchy "Dig a Hole," in which Jay suggests that his rap rivals consider digging their own graves—an unfortunate juxtaposition of images. "Do U Wanna Ride" is a moving, Kanye West–helmed ode to a friend behind bars, yet its family-first modesty is crushed by "30 Something," a middle-age manifesto that achieves a new milestone in rap's celebration of material wealth. The less said about "Anything"—a grotesquely bad, over-jittery ode to pole dancers—the better.

Jay has traveled a great distance, from one Chris Martin to another. The first, otherwise known as DJ Premier, was the purist producer partly responsible for Jay's dark, grimy debut, *Reasonable Doubt*. A decade later, he closes with "Beach Chair," the first foray into beatmaking by the infinitely more famous Chris Martin of Coldplay. Amid weepy pianos, weepier strings and the sound of 1,000 garbage cans crashing, Jay muses about his trying journey and concludes, bizarrely, that life is but a beach chair. In the background, Martin hums tenderly. This forced attempt at profundity never coheres.

It would be impossible for *any* album to meet the expectations Jay has created. When you call yourself Jay-Hova, your second coming had better be a miracle. In that sense *Kingdom Come*, despite its stronger moments—this is one of the greatest rappers alive, after all—fails its errand. Even if hip-hop needs saving, no one rapper can do it: We now know this for sure. The streets is watching, as Jay once rapped, but they have no idea what they're looking at anymore.

HUA HSU

DOWNLOAD: "Kingdom Come," "Lost Ones"

ANTHONY MANDLER.

THE SCORE

✪✪✪✪✪	CLASSIC
✪✪✪✪	GREAT
✪✪✪	GOOD
✪✪	MEDIOCRE
✪	FOUL

120 DAYS

120 DAYS ✪✪✪

VICE

Norwegian electro-rockers sex it up, and yawn

HORNY ROBOTS!

Sometime in the mid-'70s, Kraftwerk demonstrated with primitive, pulsating electronics that robots can dance and fuck and still sound bored. The tradition continues with 120 Days, a four-man Norwegian band—including three keyboardists—that has never met a bass riff it couldn't ride like a vibrator. But in spookily entrancing songs such as the nine-minute mind warp of "Come Out (Come Down, Fade Out, Be Gone)," 120 Days also invoke a nightmarish brooding that is a cold foil to their whistleable melodies. As the synths throb erotically, singer Adne Meisfjord dreams not of sex but of desolate nighttime highways, cigarette smoke and other images of oblivion: "In a trance I could dance this night away," he sighs, and he means dancing alone.

BEN SISARIO

DOWNLOAD: "Come Out (Come Down, Fade Out, Be Gone)," "Lazy Eyes"

AKON

KONVICTED ✪✪✪½

UNIVERSAL MOTOWN

Real name: Aliaune Damala Bouga Time Puru Nacka Lu Lu Lu Badara Akon Thiam. Hence, the nickname

Akon has a tear in his voice. That tear—a subtle wail—makes the Senegal-raised artist hard to classify: Half-rapping, half-singing about girls and guns, he sounds more mournful than your average gangsta rapper and too existential to be an R&B Casanova. That tear is also, on this compelling sophomore set, an enormously winning trademark. The standout tracks—the criminal's lament "Tired of Runnin'," and "Blown Away," featuring a surly-sounding Styles P— →

WHO WANTS SECONDS?

THE "GOODIES" GIRL SERVES UP THE PLEASANTLY FAMILIAR

CIARA

CIARA: THE EVOLUTION ✪✪✪½

LA FACE

GIRL, TEENAGE, RECORDS an album. Girl blows up. Girl ages a couple of years while recording second album. Girl proceeds to prove, on said album, that she's evolved: She's a *woman* now.

It's Ciara's turn to fit herself into this formula, used by PYTs from Christina Aguilera to Ashanti. On her debut, the princess of Crunk & B withheld her goodies and wore jeans; now, goes the narrative, she's sharing her deeper, 21-year-old self and rocking the occasional dress. It's gallingly tedious, except that there was always something formulaic about Ciara—which contributed to her appeal. Her alluring sound and style are one part Janet Jackson, one part Aaliyah. She made her hits from a single tasty recipe: breathy, staccato vocals over spasms of beats. Her videos unfailingly let her greatest asset (A Town-style dance skills) eclipse her shortcoming: a middling voice that toes the line between gently stroking the beat and being a mere accoutrement.

Ciara's talk about evolution is mostly that—perfunctory talk, delivered on scripted-sounding track interludes. And that's a good thing: If the formula ain't broke, why fix it? Despite a new set of producers—the Neptunes, will.i.am, Polow Da Don—this vivacious, club-friendly sophomore set merely tinkers with her old recipe. The Jazze Pha–produced "Get Up" is a dead ringer for "1, 2 Step." "That's Right" is a run-of-the-mill, crunked-out Lil Jon collaboration. And "Can't Leave 'Em Alone," on which 50 Cent performs his lover routine, bears the instantly catchy stamp of Rodney Jerkins. The '80s are a consistent presence: "I Proceed" superbly evokes Janet Jackson circa 1986, while "Get In, Fit In" mines '80s electronica, and on "Bang It Up" Ciara takes her half-spoken vocal style to its logical conclusion by sweetly, flirtatiously rapping the lyrics.

In one way, this album *is* an evolution for Ciara: It features several sentimental slow jams. But her voice is light as lace, so when she slows down the tempo—as on the plodding self-affirmation anthem "I'm Just Me"—the music is too flimsy to have force: It's a whimper, not a bang. Sometimes evolution is overrated.

BAZ DREISINGER

DOWNLOAD: "Like a Boy," "I Proceed"

CIARA'S CURRENT LISTENING

JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE
FUTURESEX/LOVESOUNDS *JIVE*

JODECI
DIARY OF A MAD BAND *MCA*

CIARA: FRANK MICELOTTA/COURTESY OF LA FACE/ZOMBA.

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A LITTLE FISHY

RAP'S FINEST WEIRDO CATCHES SEVERE POSSE-ITIS

GHOSTFACE KILLAH

MORE FISH ✪✪✪

DEF JAM

AS IF YOU couldn't tell from the monogrammed bathrobes, tone-deaf sing-song and copious references to pasta, Ghostface does things a bit differently. Releasing two albums in 2006 may be another example of flouting convention, but it's not a particularly compelling one. Despite the success (artistic, if not commercial) of *Fishscale*, one of the year's best and most surreal rap albums, the hyper-passionate Wu-Tang Clansman makes an inexplicable and—it pains one to say—somewhat unnecessary return with this patchy, protégé-heavy collection that has little in common with its near-classic predecessor.

More Fish starts auspiciously, with "Miguel Sanchez," a rousing din of horn squawks, drum rolls and "James Bond shit" storytelling—but no Ghost. Throughout, he gives way to his competent but colorless disciples the Theodore Unit, who make the most of their many chances to shine: The spry Trife Da God continues to improve, while Shawn Wiggs's meticulously detailed "Poker Face" shows Ghost's influence. But these novices lack the flair to swagger alongside their legendary mentor, sounding staid by comparison. At least when Ghost missteps—as on the noisy, exasperatingly slick club track "Good"—he fails big.

When Ghostface does hit his stride, *More Fish* can be as powerful as anything he's ever done. "Dice Game" is a grimy tale of late-night wagers gone bad that ends with two guys getting shot in the ass. The mournful "Josephine" is the album's emotional touchstone, as Ghost and Trife trade tragic stories of fiends and prostitutes from around the way. Ghost channels Rakim on the excellent, Big Daddy Kane–interpolating "Ghost Is Back," barking at light speed about fish-smelling girls and Gerald Levert–size guns, while the hazy "Stones From Greece" is a twisty tale that manages to both compliment Jamie Foxx ("He can imitate anything—trust me, that boy is hot") and accuse him of boosting the script for *Ray* ... from Ghostface. It's the kind of inscrutable, eminently rewindable moment that makes Ghostface one of the most thrilling and imaginative rappers around. Fans didn't need *More Fish*. They needed more Ghostface.

HUA HSU

DOWNLOAD: "Ghost Is Back," "Dice Game"

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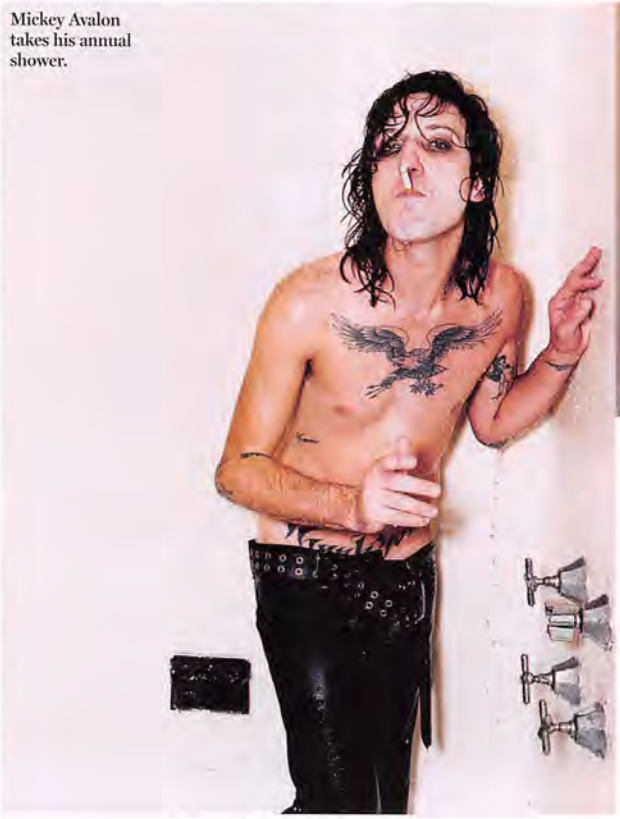

Mickey Avalon takes his annual shower.

Incubus: Lined up by height, dreaminess.

are not just catchy; they're haunting. Akon's smooth, sober vocals glide over ominous, minimalist beats. But when his focus shifts from the streets to the sheets, as on the insipid single "Smack That," his style works against him: That flat, austere delivery—ill suited for sexy seduction—is brilliant at flaunting pain, not gain.

BAZ DREISINGER

DOWNLOAD: "Blown Away," "Mama Africa"

MICKEY AVALON

MICKEY AVALON ✪✪✪✪

MYSPACE/INTERSCOPE

Sleazoid white MC drops greatest male-prostitution concept album in hip-hop history

Mickey Avalon sodomized your father in the federal penitentiary. He turned a trick on Hollywood Boulevard and smoked some crack. Did we mention that his dick—sorry, his "kosher salami"—is exquisitely coiffed? "My dick got a Caesar-do/Your dick need a tweezer, dude," Avalon raps in "My Dick," which incidentally is track number 69 on the L.A. "glam rap" pioneer's debut album. Avalon looks like the singer in a Strokes cover band, but he's got a slick, languid flow and uproarious rhymes about pansexual, drug-addled adventures as a Hollywood slime bucket. It's a novelty act, but the tacky lo-fi beats are surprisingly funky, and the taboo shattering is delicious. When's the last time you heard an MC brag about banging models *and* giving hand jobs to truckers for drug money?

JODY ROSEN

DOWNLOAD: "Waiting to Die," "Jane Fonda," "My Dick"

FLAVOR FLAV

HOLLYWOOD ✪½

DRAYTOWN

Public Enemy hypeman and reality-TV star gets buck-wild, sings

Here we have the latest example of a new media phenomenon, the post-reality-show album. This is where the stars *really* get real—where Nick reveals his divorce heartbreak, Jessica sings of love in the spotlight, and Flavor Flav, Public Enemy star and VH1 superstar, finally shows us the mind beneath the Viking helmet. To wit: "Unga bunga bunga, G! Say, Unga-bunga-*binga*-bunga!" Bring the pain. Even in the formidable politburo of P.E., Flav seemed only grudgingly to stay on message. And here, let loose from his bandmates, TV producers and former major label, the 47-year-old enigma comes off like a cheerful cross between Ol' Dirty Bastard and Carrot Top: singing Harold Melvin & the Bluenotes–style R&B, rapping jailhouse reminiscences and, mostly, busting nonsense bugouts in the style of his indelible P.E. cut "Cold Lampin' With Flavor"—which was, significantly, one track out of 16. This is 20 cuts of pure Flavor and definitely an acquired taste.

CHRIS NORRIS

DOWNLOAD: "Guess Whooz Bak"

I LOVE THIS CD!

JACK BLACK

JOURNEY
GREATEST HITS
COLUMBIA

"I'm really into Steve Perry at the moment. That dude has such a fantastic voice. I base my singing voice a bit on Steve Perry and a bit on Bobby McFerrin."

THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE QUEEN

THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE QUEEN ✪✪✪

VIRGIN

Damon Albarn drafts an '80s-fanboy dream team to get moody

After you've been a Britpop titan, cartoon rock star and holder of the Guinness record for best-selling album (by a virtual band), your next move can be elusive. Blur singer/Gorillaz founder Damon Albarn formed his third group by scanning credits on fave albums and making some calls. Enlisting producer and Gorillaz satellite member Danger Mouse, Clash bassist Paul Simonon and Fela Kuti drummer Tony Allen, he created this downcast thematic follow-up to Blur's epochal '94 album *Parklife*—that is, another album about contemporary England. But unlike the rousing punk-, Kinks- and new-wave-colored mosaic of *Parklife*, this one sticks to sepia-toned, dub-nodding abstractions—"Over London's bridge we must go/Where the guns burn with might and the hearts are low"—suggesting a wee-hours stroll through London on an LSD comedown. Which, given how England has changed since '94, sounds about right.

CHRIS NORRIS

DOWNLOAD: "80s Life," "Green Fields"

ASTONISHING FACT!
The Good, the Bad and the Queen's Paul Simonon, former bassist for the Clash, was once voted the world's sexiest man in *Playgirl* magazine.

LEE HAZLEWOOD

CAKE OR DEATH ✪✪✪✪

EVER

The droopy-eyed, mustachioed Lothario behind Nancy Sinatra's '60s hits still enjoys pop innocence with a touch of sleaze

Lee Hazlewood is one of rock & roll's great existential heroes: A producer so admired that Phil Spector cribbed from *him*, Hazlewood masterminded Duane Eddy's 1958 twangfest "Rebel Rouser" as well as Nancy Sinatra's 1966 proto-feminist treatise "These Boots Are Made for Walkin'," then turned his back on Hitsville to concentrate on his own odd, arty, country-lounge solo projects. This wry and confounding collection—reputedly his last; he has cancer—ties up a few loose ends. Hiccupping between martini jazz, spaghetti western, mariachi, German oompah and '70s soft rock, and showcasing a resurrected Eddy as well as three, count 'em, accent-laden European babes on duets, it's a suitably eccentric swan song that even finds time to bash the Iraq war. "Death or birth/Peace on earth," he growls. "What's it worth? Nothing." That philosophy explains everything.

KAREN SCHOEMER

DOWNLOAD: "Boots," "Nothing," "It's Nothing to Me" →

AVALON: KENNETH CAPPELLO; INCUBUS: BRIAN BOWEN-SMITH; BLACK: KEVIN MAZUR/WIREIMAGE.COM.

NASIR THE GROUCH

"THESE KIDS TODAY!" GRUMBLES HIP-HOP ICON

NAS

HIP-HOP IS DEAD ✪✪✪

DEF JAM

"LIFE'S A BITCH and then you die," Nas once rapped. But it's just not that easy. In between, you also get old.

Twelve years into an intermittently great career, Nasir Jones is a future Hall of Famer with at least one masterpiece to his name. But though his spot in the pantheon is secure, his rep on the streets is increasingly less so. Thus on his eighth album, the Queens-bred rapper offers up a justification worthy of Norma Desmond: *I'm still big—it's the music that got small.* Rap as he knows it is dead, Nas says, and songs like "Carry On Tradition" and the "In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida"-sampling title track lob *j'accuses* at everyone from wannabe gangstas to, somewhat mystifyingly, blacks who don't stick together as well as Jews with "friends in high places." (Sounds like someone forgot to watch his Def Jam anti-Semitism public-service announcements.) At one point he even disses—no kidding—youngsters who wear their caps backward. It's the stodgiest attack on hip-hop culture since David Stern's NBA dress code.

Ridiculous premise or no, Nas can still dazzle on the mic, and his blunt-and-cognac rasp sounds great over some of the fiercest beats he's had in years, courtesy of A-listers like Dr. Dre, Kanye West and will.i.am. (Although that last one is puzzling: If hip-hop is dead, surely the Black Eyed Peas should be detained for questioning.) And in a genre filled with MCs more concerned with growing their brand than artistic growth, there's something admirable about a hamstrung 33-year-old trying to take a stand, wrongheaded as it may be. On the other hand, it's hard to knock empty materialism when ghetto-fabulous kingpin Scott Storch is making your beats. Nas hints at this irony on "Where Are They Now," deploying a screeching James Brown sample to honor alt-rap also-rans like Black Sheep and Divine Styler. But even this is as much boast as tribute—a not-so-subtle reminder that while most of his contemporaries have faded away, he's still cashing checks.

Does he have a point? Sure. Then again, so do the grizzled coots down at Veterans of Foreign Wars Hall No. 479, debating *Matlock* and griping about teenagers and their bad manners. But that doesn't mean they're much fun to listen to.

JOSH EELLS

DOWNLOAD: "Hip-Hop Is Dead," "Can't Forget About You" feat. Chrisette Michelle

Nas flaunts his 500,000GB iPod Nano.

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UNRATED

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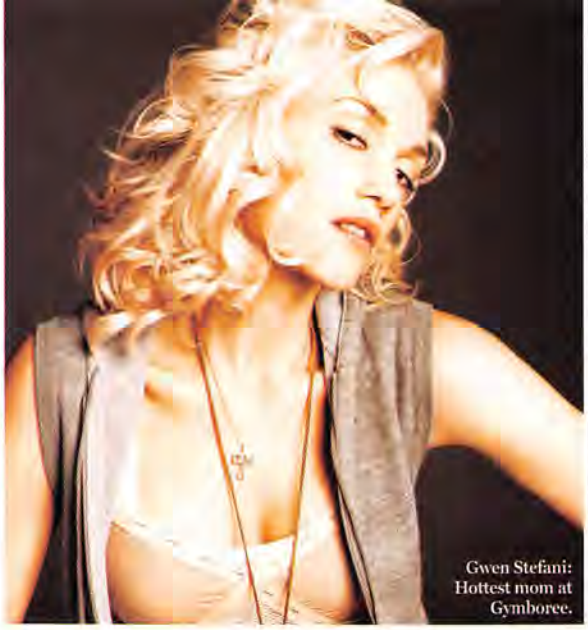


Gwen Stefani: Hottest mom at Gymboree.

BABY PHAT

FASHION PLATE CELEBRATES PREGNANCY, VOMITING

GWEN STEFANI

THE SWEET ESCAPE ✪✪✪

INTERSCOPE

THE GIRL CAN'T help it. "I came back for my spotlight," chirps Gwen Stefani in "Yummy." "Only one solo, I swore," she says, but Stefani is so natural a pop star that all it took to get her to make a second solo record was some cheertastic new rhythms, the chance for a bit of public celeb-confession and, in "Wind It Up," another bizarrely awesome treatment of a sputnik-era Broadway standard—the yodeling "Lonely Goatherd" from *The Sound of Music*, which allows Stefani the irresistible if somewhat sick pleasure of sexing up Julie Andrews.

Since appearing as a buff pinup on the cover of No Doubt's *Tragic Kingdom* in 1995, Stefani has been an ageless bottle-blond eminence, stepping from mosh pit to Paris fashion show. She's now 37, and the stakes are even higher because of a particular female circumstance. "This is the most craziest shit ever," she sings, referring not to the zips of percussion in "Don't Get It Twisted," but to the morning sickness that preceded son Kingston's birth in May.

Mommyhood rears its stretch-mark-inducing head ("Ticktock, I'm late again"), and for a moment she's thrown. On tracks that vary from ecstatic, bass-heavy thumpers to soft-rock romances and Madonna impersonations, Stefani gets her groove back when she sticks to two essentials: sex and the Neptunes, who produced five tracks with effortlessly perfect minimalism. In "Yummy," a postpartum version of Kelis's "Milkshake," Stefani delivers the steamiest conflation of food and lovemaking since *9 1/2 Weeks*.

Procreating or not, Stefani needs the dance floor: In that temple of physicality, she has her most potent and honest feelings. When she steps away into Ballad Land, a dull escapism emerges. In the title track, she pines, Beach Boys–like, for the kind of scrubbed domesticity she caricatured in *Tragic Kingdom*. And while dreamily counting her blessings in "Orange County Girl," she forgets her bootyliciousness and arrives at a disingenuous conclusion: "I'm just an Orange County girl/Livin' in an extraordinary world." She knows how bananas her shit really is.

BEN SISARIO

DOWNLOAD: "Wind It Up," "Yummy"

INCUBUS

LIGHT GRENADES ✪✪✪

EPIC

Vets of the nü stay the course with metal and mush

Drippy ballads swearing fidelity, once standard repertoire for a metal band shooting for the Top 10, had mostly vanished by the time Fred Durst announced his crusade for the nookie. Incubus, from Calabasas, California, knew better, and survived nü-metal by cultivating their mushy side. The tearjerkers flow free on their sixth studio album, with songs like "Love Hurts" ("but sometimes it's a good hurt"), giving singer Brandon Boyd a lush backdrop for some well-practiced mugging. But it's on the scarcer heavy moments like "Anna Molly," a cry of frustrated passion for an imaginary, impossibly perfect woman ("anomaly," get it?), that Boyd reveals a more potent and ambitious talent, matching the band's artillery guitars and glistening funk riffs with a voice of clear, focused yearning that's more Bono than Bon Jovi.

BEN SISARIO

DOWNLOAD: "Anna Molly," "Light Grenades"

JIM JONES

HUSTLER'S P.O.M.E. ✪✪✪

DIPLOMAT/KOCH

Harlem hero resuscitates New York hip-hop ... by ignoring it

The Diplomats are part of hip-hop's Always Be Closing generation—walking brands as likely to call themselves businessmen as rappers—and no member is more business-like than Jim Jones, who holds several label jobs in addition to MCing. So far, his juggling act has doubtless benefited his bank account more than his workmanlike rhymes; here, he finally makes his entrepreneurial savvy an asset, not a liability, blending New York realism (hardly a chart-topper of late) with the more salable Dirty South sound: squealing synths, rumbling bass, adhesive chants. "We Fly High," the album's unexpected hit, is a tawdry, Atlanta-style eruption of sinister keyboards and catchy ad-libs (the stickiest: "Baaallllin'!"). Elsewhere, Jones offsets syrupy Houston choruses with smorgasbord verses that quote Jay-Z and Jay McInerney. Who says hustlers can't carpetbag?

ROQUE STREW

DOWNLOAD: "We Fly High," "Reppin' Time"

LOS ABANDONED

MIXTAPE ✪✪✪

VAPOR/SANCTUARY

Bilingual new wavers stir sarcasm into the melting pot

Lady P, the peppy frontwoman of Los Abandoned, was born in Chile and sings in Spanglish. To judge from the L.A. foursome's debut blast of new wave *en Español*, she's right at home in Southern California. These sunny, hooky songs, filled with breakneck riffs and toy-keyboard bleeps, sometimes misjudge the line between cute and cloying, but one thing they're not is predictable. Lady P plucks a ukulele on the girl-group swoon "Office Xmas Party," and "Me Quieren en Chile," in two brisk minutes, builds from lilting calypso to a mosh-pit climax. The mood is up, but the outlook isn't all rosy. The sarcastically titled "Van Nuys (Es Very Nice)" surveys a smoggy landscape of strip malls and submits the American dream to a wry reality check: "You left your country for this."

DENNIS LIM

DOWNLOAD: "Van Nuys (Es Very Nice)," "A La Mode"

STACIE ORRICO

BEAUTIFUL AWAKENING ✪

VIRGIN

Generic crossover bid from a Seattle-born singer who was a Christian-music star at age 14

Imagine the sighs, gurgles and forced melisma of *American Idol*'s entire five seasons, processed through the prematurely strained larynx of a 20-year-old. Tack on low-key beats, equally lacking in imagination, from a slew of Southern-R&B name-brand producers like Dallas Austin, Track & Field and Kay Gee. But wait. Now subtract the combustive hooks that ordinarily drive their hits, and you're left with this ugly and sleepy simulation of soul. The negligible tunes leave this technically adept Christian-pop vet to rely on borrowed vocal tricks even as the →

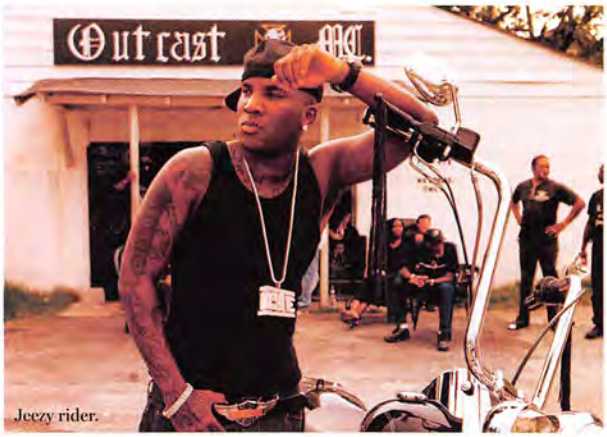
I LOVE THIS CD!

DANIEL CRAIG

THE CLASH
LONDON CALLING
EPIC

"I listened to it all during the shooting of *Casino Royale*. That band has such power. There's nothing I don't like about the Clash."

STEFANI: MARK SQUIRES; CRAIG: ANWAR HUSSEIN/WIREIMAGE.COM.



Jeezy rider.

ROCK STEADY

ATL RAPPER FINDS 600 WAYS TO SAY HE SELLS CRACK

YOUNG JEEZY

THE INSPIRATION ✪✪✪½

DEF JAM

HOORAY FOR YAYO!

YOUNG JEEZY IS a brick wall. Impenetrable and immovable, he raps about one subject—drug dealing—and raps about it slowly. He favors straight declaratives, simple values (money: good; enemies: bad) and minimal wordplay. And yet he's completely engrossing. Putting a premium on "realness," as opposed to the cadence-juggling, simile-twisting art of "rapping," he defies conventional logic about what makes a good MC: The less Jeezy says—and the less spectacularly he says it—the more believable he is.

It's a feat that any rapper *not* blessed with Jeezy's burnt-edged croak would have a hard time executing. His sludgy tempos mean more hang time for each syllable, which could make for plodding torture, except Jeezy turns every phoneme into a sonic delight (he's made vivid catch-phrases of mundane expressions like "yeah," "damn" and "that's right"). Here, the Atlanta MC proves immovable in another way: Despite slimming down, he hasn't shed a kilo since his coke-obsessed 2005 debut, *Let's Get It*. Song after song is about slapping grimy rubber bands on grimy cash in still grimier locales. On "I'm Here," he pulls an anti-*Cribs*: "Just a stove in my trap," he declares, "no beds, no sofa." It's the boast of a salesman who knows his clientele; rapping about cooking crack made him famous—rapping about fame might well send him back to cooking crack.

Because of his no-frills persona, the smallest suggestions of personality make a charismatic impact: "Jeezy like to drink, Jeezy like to smoke," he raps on "J.E.E.Z.Y.," making the simplistic brag irresistible (third-person perspective, as always, helps). When he trades his Ferrari for "a spaceship" on the fantastic "3 A.M.," it's a happy splash of surrealism—perhaps encouraged by Timbaland's gulping, humming production.

There's something chilling about Jeezy's sangfroid, and it gets a bit deadening across 18 tracks of dark, bottom-heavy synths. On "Dreamin'," he actually reveals something about himself: His mother was a crack addict. It's a fascinating revelation, but it's merely mentioned, described and dropped. A brick falls from the wall, but the hole gets patched right up.

JONAH WEINER

DOWNLOAD: "3 A.M.," "J.E.E.Z.Y."

YOUNG JEEZY: JONATHAN MANNION.

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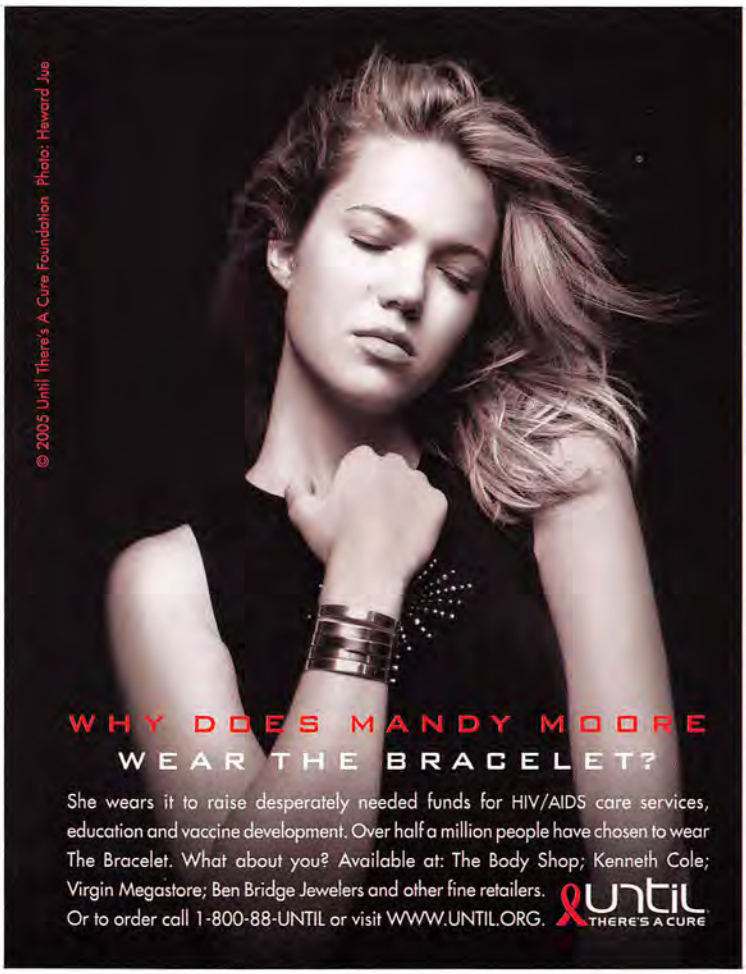
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BLENDER APPROVED

The best releases from the past months

JOANNA NEWSOM

YS

DRAG CITY

Oddball indie harpist paints a masterpiece of quirky arrangements and Celtic shout-outs.

DEFTONES

SATURDAY NIGHT WRIST

MAVERICK/WARNER BROS.

Over stunning noise, metal's gentlest brutes emote portentously about the end of the world.

DAMIEN RICE

9

HEFFA/VECTOR/WARNER BROS.

A moody Irishman with a pop knack delivers a contemplative, shape-shifting breakup set.

COLD WAR KIDS

ROBBERS & COWARDS

DOWNTOWN

Blog-beloved L.A. scruffballs blend soused storytelling and blue-eyed soul on great debut.

home-schooled lyrics celebrate simplicity and authenticity. The flat-footed single "I'm Not Missing You" offers such little melodic movement amid drowsy guitars and dull keyboards that the obligatory hip-hop beats remain shackled. For all of Orrico's strained affirmations, the result is crushingly lethargic.

BARRY WALTERS

DOWNLOAD: None

ROCK STAR SUPERNOVA

ROCK STAR SUPERNOVA ✪✪✪

EPIC

Lukas Rossi—rock-star aspirant and reality-show benefactor—addresses the School of Rock's graduating class with a howl

The funny thing about hard-rock veterans calling themselves Supernova is that a supernova is a star in its last gasp, just before it implodes. It's an unintended irony that gets at the tension of this made-for-TV rock band: This may or not be the last tango for Mötley Crüe drummer Tommy Lee, ex-Metallica bassist Jason Newsted and ex-Guns N' Roses guitarist Gilby Clarke, but for their newly elected singer, Lukas Rossi, this moment means everything—from both sides of the telescope, everybody's got a reason to burn bright. In the end, the elders let Rossi own the record—he may have come on late and ladled vocals and lyrics onto otherwise complete songs, but he asserts himself quickly with a lurid, drooling charm. "Leave the Lights On" is a trashy T. Rex booty crawl, and "Valentine" is a Velcro revolver—like the best of this record, it's a for-show readymade, but it sticks all the same.

RJ SMITH

DOWNLOAD: "Headspin," "Social Disgrace"

SWITCHFOOT

OH! GRAVITY ✪✪½

COLUMBIA

The anti-technology rants? Crusty. The beats? Hot!

Hand claps, kicky big choruses, *la las*: Hey, one of Christian rock's biggest bands has lightened up! Well, sorta:

Productionwise, the '80s-inspired tunes on *Oh! Gravity* wallop those on the San Diego group's last two standard-alt-rock albums. When Jon Foreman starts singing, though, the record becomes considerably less fun. He hectors society for being too dependent on technology on the bluesy lead single "Dirty Second Hands." He comes down firmly against the excess that comes with success on "American Dream." And yes, he reminds us that we need a lot more love in this world in "Amateur Lovers." (In this case, lyrics like "We're spinning round in circles" aren't the best idea.) When Foreman shuts up and lets us dance, though, *Oh! Gravity* leaves the ground for real.

ANDREW BEAUJON

DOWNLOAD: "Amateur Lovers"

TRALALA

IS THAT THE TRALALA ✪✪✪

AUDIKA

Sassy Brooklyn vocal group will have you seeing quadruple

Tralala have an answer for the charisma-deficient slouches common in indie rock: four frontladies named Nicole, Erin, Liane and Stella, all with excellent bangs and a sassy take on the '60s girl group. The three guys backing them play drum-tight, no-frills garage rock like an old-school house band, toiling in the shadows, lending the melodies kick. It's a vintage formula tinged with slashing post-punk and rounded out by studiously timeless lyrics concerning dancing (the blithely charming "Are You Gonna Dance [With Me]?"), jealousy (the balladlike threat "Secret Weapon") and—in the pitch-perfect "Yellow Taxi," which is punctuated by *beep beeps*—getting home at night from the bar. But for all the vocal firepower, there's little flashy harmonizing and no apparent alpha female. There are no slouches here, but no true stars, either.

NICK CATUCCI

DOWNLOAD: "Yellow Taxi," "Are You Gonna Dance (With Me)?"

READ THOUSANDS OF REVIEWS AND MORE AT BLENDER.COM.

Switchfoot celebrate National Boycott Bright Colors Day.

SWITCHFOOT: JEREMY COWART.

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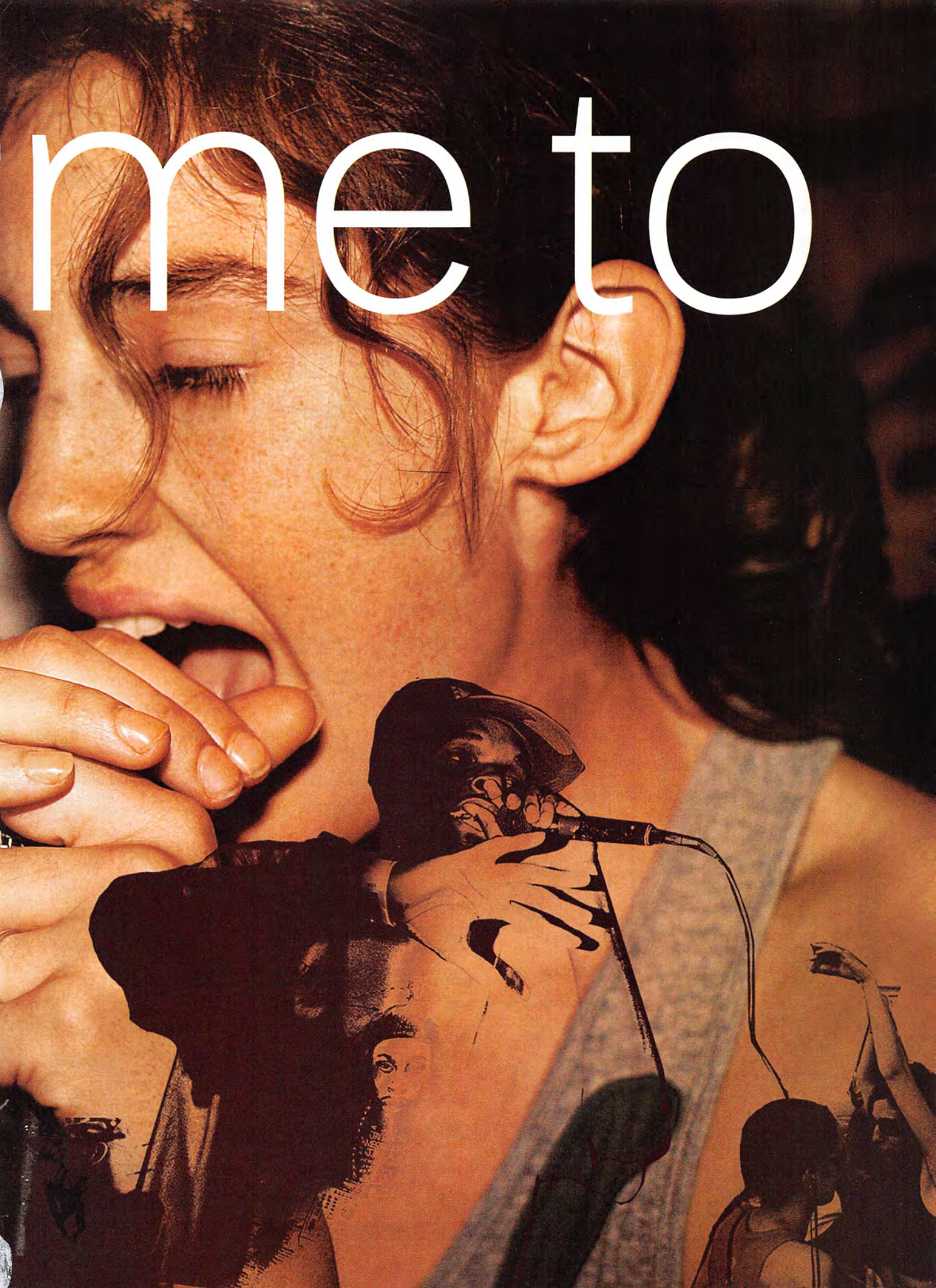
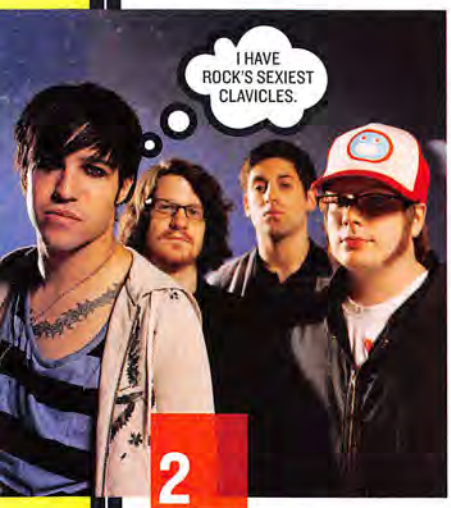

me to

THE 33 MOST WANTED SONGS IN AMERICA

POP PUNKS? NOPE. POP GODS? UH-UH. THIS MONTH, NO ONE CAN BEST FERG E. FERG



2 FALL OUT BOY

"THIS AIN'T A SCENE, IT'S AN ARMS RACE"

INFINITY ON HIGH

Scenesters, take cover: Pete Wentz and his erstwhile emo cohorts are dropping a 50-megaton H-bomb on the message boards with this lead single from their fourth album, due in February. The CD includes several tracks produced by R&B hit man Babyface, a fact that the eternally self-referential band recently poked fun at in a video on its Web site.

HOW WE DID IT

aolmusic.com

The Most Wanted Songs chart is based on the number of audience searches, downloads and video plays on AOLmusic.com.

POSITION	TITLE	ARTIST	ALBUM/LABEL
1	"FERGALICIOUS"	FERGIE	THE DUTCHESS *INTERSCOPE*
2	"THIS AIN'T A SCENE, IT'S AN ARMS RACE"	FALL OUT BOY	INFINITY ON HIGH *ISLAND*
3	"MY LOVE"	JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE FEAT. T.I.	FUTURESEX/LOVESOUNDS *JIVE*
4	"HOW TO SAVE A LIFE"	THE FRAY	HOW TO SAVE A LIFE *EPIC*
5	"I WANNA LOVE YOU"	AKON FEAT. SNOOP DOGG	KONVICTED *UNIVERSAL MOTOWN*
6	"WIND IT UP"	GWEN STEFANI	THE SWEET ESCAPE *INTERSCOPE*
7	"LOST ONES"	JAY-Z	KINGDOM COME *DEF JAM*
8	"HURT"	CHRISTINA AGUILERA	BACK TO BASICS *RCA*
9	"LIPS OF AN ANGEL"	HINDER	EXTREME BEHAVIOR *UNIVERSAL*
10	"LYING IS THE MOST FUN A GIRL CAN HAVE WITHOUT TAKING HER CLOTHES OFF"	PANIC! AT THE DISCO	A FEVER YOU CAN'T SWEAT OUT *FUELED BY RAMEN*
11	"MONEY MAKER"	LUDACRIS FEAT. PHARRELL	RELEASE THERAPY *DEF JAM*
12	"IRREPLACEABLE"	BEYONCÉ	B'DAY *COLUMBIA/SONY URBAN MUSIC*
13	"WAIT A MINUTE"	THE PUSSYCAT DOLLS	PCD *INTERSCOPE*
14	"BREAK IT OFF"	RIHANNA FEAT. SEAN PAUL	A GIRL LIKE ME *DEF JAM*
15	"IT ENDS TONIGHT"	THE ALL-AMERICAN REJECTS	MOVE ALONG *INTERSCOPE*
16	"THROUGH GLASS"	STONE SOUR	COME WHAT(EVER) MAY *ROADRUNNER*
17	"LET'S RIDE (STRIP CLUB)"	THE GAME	DOCTOR'S ADVOCATE *GEFFEN*
18	"SAY IT RIGHT"	NELLY FURTADO	LOOSE *GEFFEN*
19	"COME BACK TO ME"	VANESSA HUDGENS	V *HOLLYWOOD*
20	"SMACK THAT"	AKON FEAT. EMINEM	KONVICTED *UNIVERSAL MOTOWN*
21	"WHEN YOU WERE YOUNG"	THE KILLERS	SAM'S TOWN *ISLAND*
22	"CHASING CARS"	SNOW PATROL	EYES OPEN *INTERSCOPE*
23	"SAY GOODBYE"	CHRIS BROWN	CHRIS BROWN *JIVE*
24	"WELCOME TO THE BLACK PARADE"	MY CHEMICAL ROMANCE	THE BLACK PARADE *REPRISE*
25	"PROMISE"	CIARA	CIARA: THE EVOLUTION *LA FACE/JIVE*
26	"TELL ME"	DIDDY FEAT. CHRISTINA AGUILERA	PRESS PLAY *BAD BOY*
27	"CHAIN HANG LOW"	JIBBS	JIBBS FEAT. JIBBS *GEFFEN*
28	"MANEATER"	NELLY FURTADO	LOOSE *GEFFEN*
29	"SHOW STOPPER"	DANITY KANE	DANITY KANE *BAD BOY*
30	"GALLERY"	MARIO VAZQUEZ	MARIO VAZQUEZ *J*
31	"WE RIDE (INTO THE FUTURE)"	MARY J. BLIGE	REFLECTIONS—A RETROSPECTIVE *GEFFEN*
32	"LIAR (IT TAKES ONE TO KNOW ONE)"	TAKING BACK SUNDAY	LOUDER NOW *WARNER BROS.*
33	"FAMOUS LAST WORDS"	MY CHEMICAL ROMANCE	THE BLACK PARADE *REPRISE*

WEEK ENDING / SUNDAY, DECEMBER 3

5 AKON FEAT. SNOOP DOGG

"I WANNA LOVE YOU"

KONVICTED

The Senegalese rapper-singer and the world's most lovable Crip team up for this seam-splittingly horny love-jam—or, in the case of the unedited version, fuck-jam. This month, Akon will perform (curse-free, we imagine) on ABC's *New Year's Rockin' Eve* special.

19 VANESSA HUDGENS

"COME BACK TO ME"

V

You can almost smell the hormones on this miss-you burner from the 18-year-old Hudgens, who got famous playing math nerd turned drama star Gabriella Montez in Disney's *High School Musical*. Hudgens will appear on the *HSM* arena tour through the end of January. Don't forget your hairbrush microphone!

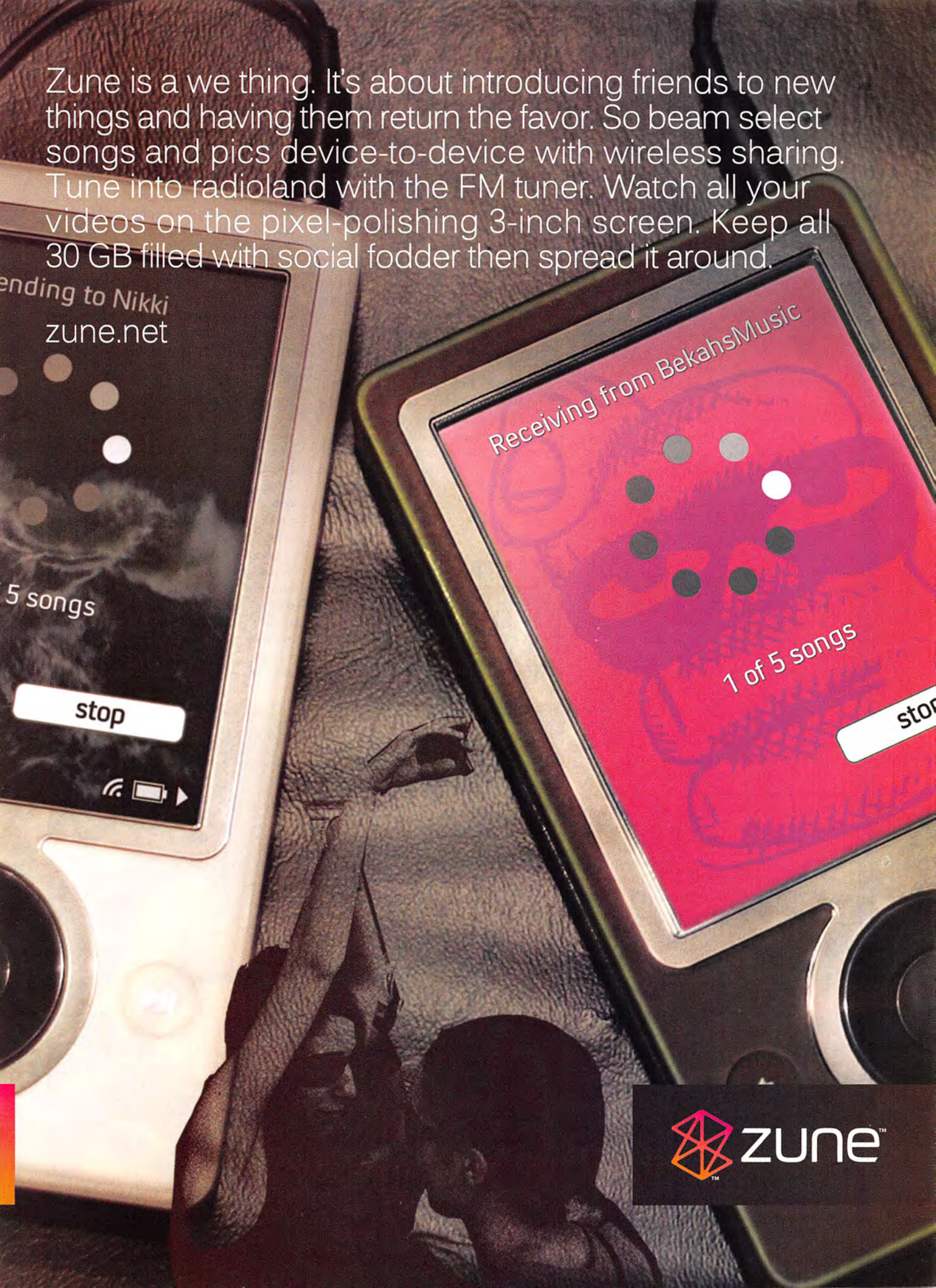
31 MARY J. BLIGE

"WE RIDE (INTO THE FUTURE)"

REFLECTIONS—A RETROSPECTIVE

This is a happier, rainbow-after-the-storm Mary than we're used to. It's a new song featured on her greatest-hits collection, *Reflections*. To promote it, fans were invited to submit their own (Blige-related) reflections, and a choice few will be filmed for her Web site.

HUDGENS: ANDREW MACPHERSON; BLIGE: MARKUS KLINKO AND INDRANI.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U2 R GR8

HOW DID BONO AND CO. BECOME THE BIGGEST ROCK BAND IN THE WORLD? CALL IT A MIX OF AMBITION, FOOLISHNESS AND A GIANT SENSE OF JOY

U2

U218 SINGLES ✪✪✪½

INTERSCOPE

BY NOW—26 years after four Irish lads all but spontaneously combusted from the detonation of their outrageous, Mt. Olympus-size ambition—it's clear that, love 'em or loathe 'em, U2 get the longevity prize. No prior holder of the World's Greatest Rock Band title has kept at it so long, without lineup changes or a drummer dying in an Italian hotel room. U2 have pulled this off not in spite of a penchant for self-parody, but because of it. Their embarrassing excursions into American roots rock (*Rattle and Hum*) and "techno" (*Pop*) are testaments to rampant, self-deluding rock-star ego, which led them into styles a less foolish band would avoid. Nowadays, Bono jokes about his "messianic complex" and winks beneath his wraparound shades, but he's still singing about love, God and politics in huge, ringing songs that emulate jet engines.

A dozen of these 18 singles appeared on two previous compilations, released four years ago; the new record adds two songs from *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb*, two from *All That You Can't Leave Behind* and two new Rick Rubin productions, the cruddy Green Day collaboration "The Saints Are Coming" and "Window in the Skies," a laughably pro forma U2 ballad from the celestial lyrical conceit to the predictable falsetto *whoops* in the outro. Some of the other choices are curious. There is nothing from the first two albums—a weird omission, given the fabulous 1980 cover photo, with Bono and the boys looking like poofy-haired models for a chain of Dublin discount shops. And they could've chosen a better single from *Achtung Baby* than "Mysterious Ways," whose wah-propelled funk-lite has aged as badly as Bono's mullet.

Singles compilations are by definition reductive, and this is especially true for U2, whose albums are more adventurous than the hits would lead you to believe. On *The Joshua Tree*, "With or Without You" nestles up against "Trip Through Your Wires," a weird foray into high-desert pop; *Achtung Baby* concludes with the grim "Love Is Blindness," featuring the Edge's mostly bruisingly dissonant guitar. *U218 Singles* boils them down to their two most grandiose modes, the Uplifting Anthem and the Inspirational Ballad: "Where the Streets Have No Name," "Sometimes You Can't Make It on Your Own" and other songs from the soundtrack to Bono's Nobel Peace Prize presentation ceremony.

It's a partial picture, but a revealing one—U2 use album tracks for balance and contrast, but their hearts are in the kind of singles that leave the whole world humming. Haters hear only bombast in these globe-hugging jingles, but U2's high-minded aspirations are wrapped up with the megalomania they've learned to laugh at, and the carnality they've learned to celebrate. Sure, they're idealistic, but they're sensualists, not saints. Sure, they'd like to see Third World debt canceled, and peace on earth would be nice, too. But U2 also want to save the planet so they can mount another mega-million-grossing arena tour, flirt with models at afterparties and maybe buy another boutique hotel or two.

U2'S HEARTS ARE IN THE KIND OF SINGLES THAT LEAVE THE WHOLE WORLD HUMMING.

It's easy to get swept up in their skyrocketing sound, but you need the enclosed lyric sheet to grasp the ironies and—yes, despite their reputation for flag-waving—subtleties of the songs. Their greatest record, "One," is a harrowing vision of romantic dissolution that still gets mistaken for a homily about global unity. The magic of U2's music is the way it moves from the cosmic to the workaday, from blinding light to blackness, often in the quick of a single couplet. "See the canyons broken by cloud/ See the tuna fleets clearing the sea out," Bono sings in "Beautiful Day," a song that contemplates traffic jams and lost love and, oh yeah, apocalypse, and still argues, with the full fathom force of an operatic vocal cresting over major chords, that you should step outside and enjoy the sunshine. Down here, the streets are dirty and defiled and they definitely have names. But the goal, always, is elevation.

JODY ROSEN

DOWNLOAD: "New Year's Day," "Beautiful Day," "One"

Finalists in the Miss Dublin pageant: (L-R) Larry Mullen Jr., Adam Clayton, Bono and the Edge.

ANTON CORBIJN.

THE SCORE	
✪✪✪✪✪	CLASSIC
✪✪✪✪	GREAT
✪✪✪	GOOD
✪✪	MEDIOCRE
✪	FOUL

DAVID CROSBY

VOYAGE ✪✪✪½

RHINO

Celebrity sperm donor distills 40 stone-y years into three CDs

Part swallow-throated love god and part bad boy's bad boy, David Crosby was a key harmonizer and strummer for the original Byrds as well as the long-enduring Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young franchise. CSNY's baroque folk-rock flame burned hot and fast back then, with the quartet's initial rupture resulting in Crosby's weirdly wonderful solo album: Amply represented here, 1971's *If I Could Only Remember My Name* is a hallucinatory ego trip manifesting nearly every self-indulgent vice and experimental virtue of its era. Crosby and Nash's 1972 duo album established a long-standing partnership that survived the walrus-mustached crooner's powder-powered swan dive, mid-'80s jail stint and mid-'90s liver upgrade. By cherry-picking his extensive discography and adding a CD's worth of groovy demos, live tracks and previously unreleased gems (especially "Kids and Dogs," with Jerry Garcia), *Voyage* makes a strong case for this professional survivor's legacy.

RICHARD GEHR

DOWNLOAD: "What Are Their Names?" "Cowboy Movie"

DAVE MATTHEWS BAND

THE BEST OF WHAT'S AROUND, VOL. I ✪✪✪½

RCA

From an aw-shucks dude in Tevas, 12 years of hits to knock boots to

For a guy with the most rabid personality cult this side of Kim Jong-Il, Dave Matthews is awfully democratic. On his first-ever hits compilation, the incense-voiced South African and his jam-buddies–turned–backup-band open the request line and let fans decide the set list. The second disc, featuring unreleased live performances, drags: Electric-fiddle solos might be a godsend after your eighth trip to the H.O.R.D.E. tour beer tent, but not here. For sheer radio-ready prettiness, though, you can't beat the moonlit makeout ballads on disc one, like the sinuous "Crush," or "Crash Into Me," the song that launched a thousand pregnancy scares. Most surprising in retrospect is what a filthy horndog the coed-serenading King of Bros has always been: "I wanna see you open wide"? "Let me drink you, please"? Why Mr. Matthews—we never!

JOSH EELLS

DOWNLOAD: "Crash Into Me," "The Space Between"

GANG STARR

MASS APPEAL: THE BEST OF GANG STARR ✪✪✪✪½

VIRGIN

A new primer on beloved jazz-rap pioneers

Forget the title: Gang Starr had no mass appeal, probably because deadpan drawler Guru is one of history's most self-effacing rappers. But these 20 tracks, culled largely from *Step in the Arena* (1991) and *Daily Operation* (1992), justify the duo's hero status among purists, and form a better compilation than a 1999 set that held 11 more songs, including needless remixes. Guru is no rhyme virtuoso, but he spins a vivid street narrative and is an oddly inventive shit-talker ("You puny protozoa," he scoffs in "Check the Technique"). The real star, though, is DJ Premier, whose groundbreaking jazz-flavored beats ("Take It Personal") and scratch-happy psychedelic mini-symphonies ("Just to Get a Rep") remain some of the most compelling music ever created by a hip-hop producer.

JODY ROSEN

DOWNLOAD: "Just to Get a Rep," "Soliloquy of Chaos"

Dave Matthews tries to grin and bear it.

OASIS

STOP THE CLOCKS ✪✪✪✪

EPIC

Two CDs of boozing and bawling

Familiarity has bred contempt for Oasis's never-changing moods, but their mid-'90s hellcat rockers—replete with Noel Gallagher's too-loud guitars and brother Liam's defiant, razored vocals—match Mott the Hoople at the apogee of British boogie. There's even melancholy detail in Noel's romancers (say, the lachrymose wobble of "Wonderwall"'s Mellotron coda), belying the reflexive image of the band as blustering idiot savants with three chords and a black eye. Noel's lyrics will never win a Pulitzer ("Tomorrow never knows what it doesn't know too soon," apparently), and recent albums are wisely underrepresented here. But there's rare jubilation in the shaggy funk of 2000's "Go Let It Out," and even in the stomping Godzilla beat of 2005's "Lyla," that says Oasis should survive their now-defunct Sony deal. Live forever? Well, almost.

TONY POWER

DOWNLOAD: "Live Forever," "Rock 'n' Roll Star," "Champagne Supernova"

LUCINDA WILLIAMS

CAR WHEELS ON A GRAVEL ROAD (DELUXE EDITION) ✪✪✪✪½

MERCURY/LOST HIGHWAY/UME

Troubled Louisianan suffers heartbreaks all across the South

If there's one thing Lucinda Williams loves, it's falling out of love. This 1998 masterpiece, which catapulted her from long-underappreciated critics' cause to Grammy-winning alt-country queen, is a mash note to heartache. Conceived as a meandering road trip through the Mississippi Delta, where every stop is either an old mistake or a new one waiting to happen, *Car Wheels* glides through juke-joint blues, twangy elegies and horny folk laments, as Williams's bruised, unvarnished voice revels in every teardrop. Self-sabotage has always been her weakness: She's hopelessly attracted to boozehounds ("Drunken Angel"), felons ("Concrete and Barbed Wire") and other fuck-ups, and her notorious perfectionism delayed this album for years while she recorded the whole thing three times. But when the result is songs as gorgeous as these—augmented now by two good-not-great new tracks and a juiced-up live set—well, the tears may have been worth it.

JOSH EELLS

DOWNLOAD: "Jackson," "2 Kool 2 Be 4-Gotten," "Can't Let Go"

BLENDER APPROVED

The best reissues from the past months

JAMES BROWN

SINGLES: THE FEDERAL YEARS

HIP-OSELECT.COM

First in a J.B. singles survey traces the funkmaster from one-hit wonder to one-man hit factory.

PAVEMENT

WOWEE ZOWEE: SORDID SENTINELS EDITION

MATADOR

Reissue of these rock absurdists' finest CD adds freak-out outtakes.

READ THOUSANDS OF REVIEWS AND MORE AT BLENDER.COM.

CHRIS BUCK/CORBIS OUTLINE

switchfoot

"Oh! Gravity."

The NEW album featuring the hit "Oh! Gravity."

Album in Stores and online December 26, 2006

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DON'T FORGET ABOUT YOU.

THE BYRDS
There Is A Season

Take flight with the ultimate American rock band! 99 tracks on 4 CDs, including 5 unissued tracks, plus a DVD with 10 previously unreleased TV appearances from 1965-1967.

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Ricky Jay Plays Poker

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BUDDY GUY
Can't Quit The Blues

His first definitive, career-spanning collection! 3 CDs with 6 previously unavailable tracks, plus a DVD with 11 never-before-seen live performances, a documentary and more.

WEATHER REPORT
Forecast: Tomorrow

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At San Quentin

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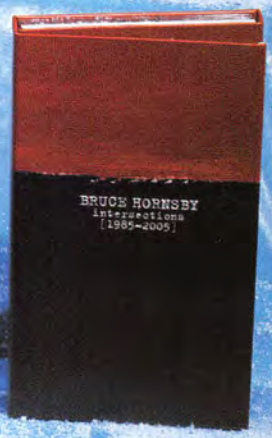
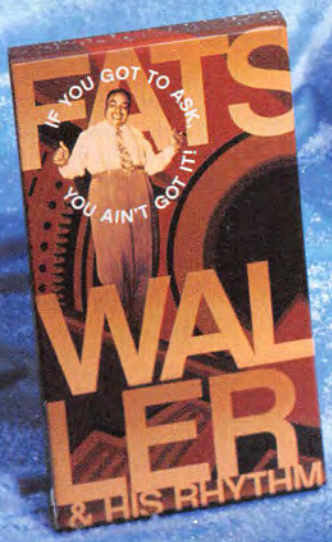


BRUCE HORNSBY
Intersections 1985-2005

Commemorating his 20th anniversary, this 5-disc set includes 53 tracks on 4 CDs (26 previously unreleased), 23 performances on DVD (21 previously unreleased) and more.

WAYLON JENNINGS
Nashville Rebel

The first-ever comprehensive box devoted to the country music legend: 92 tracks on 4 CDs, including all his hits, fan favorites, previously unreleased tracks, duets and more.



FATS WALLER
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2006 REASONS TO LOVE THIS YEAR'S MOVIES

HOW WILL WE REMEMBER THE YEAR'S MOST OUTSTANDING AND OUTRAGEOUS FLICKS? LET US COUNT THE WAYS

BY DAVID FEAR

3

Hours per night the average person spends in deep REM sleep, which is the terrain explored in Michel Gondry's bugged-out bedtime story **THE SCIENCE OF SLEEP**

Flipping between multiplex-friendly romantic comedy, stop-motion-animation interludes and scenes involving large papier-mâché hands, this tweaked tale is all over the cerebral map, but it boasts some of the most striking images you're likely to see without raiding Mom's medicine cabinet. And Gael García Bernal and Charlotte Gainsbourg are, like, so dreamy!

450

Real slithery snakes that were wrangled for **SNAKES ON A PLANE**

It's hard to say what's more impressive about this combo platter of deadly reptiles, commercial air travel and resident badass mofo Samuel L. Jackson: the fact that they got so many damned serpents in one place (only 60 were allowed on set at any given time), or that this Sam 'n' cheese sandwich's savvy Web campaign sold the film to cine-geeks as both an in-joke and the second coming of *Die Hard*. Either way, given the disappointing result, we're not sure we trust you anymore, Internet.

16

Acts that performed in **DAVE CHAPPELLE'S BLOCK PARTY** (yes, we're including the marching band)

Michel Gondry's document of the comedian's one-day free concert in New York's Bed-Stuy featuring the Roots, Mos Def and Talib Kweli, Kanye West, and a reunited Fugees, makes for a nice 21st-century bohemian rhapsody, as well as a reminder that Chappelle did more than just walk away from a hit TV show. No word on exactly how many hands were thrown in the air and waved around like their owners didn't care.

500

Audition tapes John Cameron Mitchell received for his open casting call for **SHORTBUS**

The *Hedwig* auteur eventually chose eight lucky participants for the cast; not one of them was a transsexual glam rocker with a one-inch penis. The New Yorkers who inhabit Mitchell's dysfunctional Gotham may look for love in all the wrong places, but when it comes to hardcore copulating, it's pure Welcome to the Pleasuredome: twosomes, threesomes, full-tilt kink and a rousing rendition of the national anthem you probably won't see opening a Yankees game anytime soon.

5

Times Martin Scorsese has been nominated for a Best Director Oscar

The number of wins? Zero. Zilch. *Bupkis*. Whether that changes thanks to **THE DEPARTED** remains to be seen. Because this brutal, kinetic crime drama about undercover brothers and dirty rats in South Boston is full of graphic violence and the sort of creatively foulmouthed dialogue usually reserved for stevedore conventions, conservative Academy voters may be too taken aback to even consider it. What is truly shocking, however, is that after several duds in a row, Scorsese bounces back and makes the best film of the year. With Matt Damon and Leo DiCaprio as street toughs, no less.

SNAKE: MARTIN HARVEY/CORBIS; BORAT: SCOTT GRIES/GETTY IMAGES.

85

Percent chance you'll be dissuaded from even considering teaching an urban-high-school class while on crack after seeing Ryan Gosling in **HALF NELSON**

Sure, his dialectics-spouting teacher is a hit with the kids, and the movie's Brooklyn setting and Broken Social Scene soundtrack add a cachet of indie-flick hipness. But after watching Gosling get strung out for 90 minutes, any residual glamour dissipates in a cloud of coke smoke and failed dreams. By the time he hits rock bottom by scoring drugs from his star student, even the most strident baseheads may convert their pipes into harmless Christmas-tree decorations.

400

Hours of footage director Larry Charles claims he shot to make the 84 snot-bubble-inducing minutes of **BORAT: CULTURAL LEARNINGS OF AMERICA FOR MAKE BENEFIT GLORIOUS NATION OF KAZAKHSTAN**

Real-life Jew Sacha Baron Cohen takes his socially backward, anti-Semitic alter ego across America in search of future spouse Pamela Anderson, only to find racists, rednecks, a Winnebago full of drunken frat dudes and a surprising amount of male full-frontal nudity. Come for the *Jackass*-style gross-out gags, stay for the lacerating social commentary.

500

Hours it took to "rotoscope" one minute of film for **A SCANNER DARKLY**

And considering the movie is almost two hours long, well ... that's like a jillion hours all told. Richard Linklater's adaptation of Philip K. Dick's schizo sci-fi novel depicts a future in which citizens are constantly spied upon and corporations conspire to narcotize the masses, if one can imagine such a preposterous thing. The director then ups the mind-fuck ante by laboriously, painstakingly animating on top of the live-action footage. He also gets a great performance out of Keanu Reeves, which had to have been almost as time-consuming.

47

Chromosomes possessed by most principal cast members in Crispin Hellion Glover's **WHAT IS IT?**

As for what Glover's nine-years-in-the-making experimental opus—featuring snails, self-abusing midgets, a Shirley Temple doll in a Nazi uniform and, yes, actors with Down syndrome—*is* exactly, it's hard to say. A parable on the inanity of modern living? A satire on superficial social mores? Crass exploitation of the differently abled? A dessert topping? A floor wax? All we know is, it's deeply, deeply weird and resolutely unlike anything else unspooled in cinemas this year.

BEST MUSIC DVDS OF 2006

"Sure, I can play 'Crazy.'"

1 THE DEVIL AND DANIEL JOHNSTON

SONY CLASSICS

A *Capturing the Friedmans* for the flannel-and-Chucks set, Jeff Feuerzeig's heartbreaking documentary uses Daniel Johnston's homemade videos and recordings to chronicle the endearing manic-depressive singer-songwriter's unlikely ascent to alt-rock quasi-stardom and far less unlikely descent into full-blown madness. Just as *Crumb* turned a beloved underground artist into a populist hero, this film renders Johnston a compelling, heartbreaking figure to even those who'd find his lo-lo-fi ditties themselves a bit crazy-making.

2 NIRVANA LIVE! TONIGHT! SOLD OUT!!

GEFFEN/UME

Though initially conceived as a modest odds-and-sods collection of live clips and interviews capturing Nirvana at their chaotic post-*Nevermind* zenith, this long-sought-after 1994 video, new to DVD, serves as a poignant, often hilarious snapshot of a band, shell-shocked by unexpected fame, in that fleeting instant before it all went horribly wrong.

3 NEW YORK DOLL

FIRST INDEPENDENT

After the New York Dolls hung up their stilettos, bassist Arthur "Killer" Kane took a well-traveled road—alcoholism, reluctant obscurity—before veering down a strange one, working in a Mormon library. Watching Kane accomplish his dream of reuniting the Dolls, only to die suddenly of leukemia soon after, makes for the sweetest and saddest *Behind the Music* episode VH1 never made.

4 EVERYONE STARES: THE POLICE INSIDE OUT

UNIVERSAL

What drummer Stewart Copeland's home movies lack in their ability (or willingness) to provide a well-rounded history of his band's rise from scrappy punks to international rock stars is more than made up for by their intimacy. Worth noting: Before the lutes, before the rain forests, Sting wasn't a bad rock star. Although he may still have been an asshole.

5 MY MORNING JACKET: OKONOKOS

RCA

At this point, live DVDs are de rigueur for any artist looking to churn out a little extra product between albums, but rare is the one that not only has lush production values to maximize the you-are-there experience but shows a band in peak form, as this one does with the Kentucky twang-rock quintet. Also features an alpaca for good measure.

STEVE KANDELL AND LAUREN HARRIS

DEVIL AND DANIEL JOHNSTON: J. MCCONNICO/COURTESY OF SONY PICTURES CLASSICS INC.

MOST REALISTICALLY RENDERED SWEAT

FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 3

(*EA Sports*, 360)

If you're fed up with the faceless no-names in boxing today, get in the ring with eye-popping clones of Ali, Frazier and other classic pros. Who knew "the sweet science" actually referred to graphics programming?

(RUNNER-UP)

NBA 2K7 (*2K Sports*, 360, PS2)

Pixelated perspiration so lifelike you'll think you're sitting between Spike Lee and Woody Allen at a Knicks game. Except on your Xbox, the Knicks might actually win.

BEST *GRAND THEFT AUTO* RIP-OFF

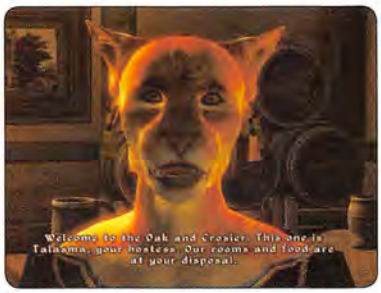
BULLY (*Rockstar*, PS2)

The semi-controversial title turned out to be a largely bloodless high-school morality tale, where bullies get bullied, the weak find redemption and our socially progressive teenage tough-guy hero gets to snog both girls and boys.

(RUNNER-UP)

SAINTS ROW (*THQ*, 360)

A shameless *GTA*-in-the-ghetto rip-off that's almost better than the original.



BEST REASON TO QUIT YOUR JOB AND ANSWER ONLY TO YOUR ELF NAME

THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION (*Bethesda Softworks*, 360, PC)

No, it's not a Dio album—it's just the most ambitious, most addictive fantasy role-playing game ever. Be prepared to cut yourself off from all human contact, because finishing this epic will eat up more man-hours than any employed person should have available.

(RUNNER-UP)

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS 2 (*Atari*, PC)

More sword-and-sorcery swashbuckling than the entire Errol Flynn film library.

GAMES OF THE YEAR

WHERE DID ALL YOUR FREE TIME AND DISPOSABLE INCOME GO IN 2006? REFRESH YOUR MEMORY WITH OUR ROUNDUP OF THE YEAR'S BEST, BRIGHTEST AND POINTLESSEST

BY LIBE GOAD

BEST GAME FOR THAT "I LOVE THE SMELL OF FALLUJAH IN THE MORNING" VIBE

TOM CLANCY'S GHOST RECON ADVANCED WARFIGHTER

(*Ubisoft*, 360, PC, PS2, Xbox)

Forget the John Wayne bayonet-charge-over-the-foxhole-wall. Modern warfare goes like this: skulk from one corner to the next, waving your buddies ahead with hand signals, while you—oops!—catch a sniper's bullet in the eye. Game over.

(RUNNER-UP)

CALL OF DUTY 3 (*Activision*, 360, PS2)

Spoiler alert—the Allies win WWII. We love a happy ending.

BEST GAME DEPICTING HUMANITY'S BLEAK, HOPELESS FUTURE

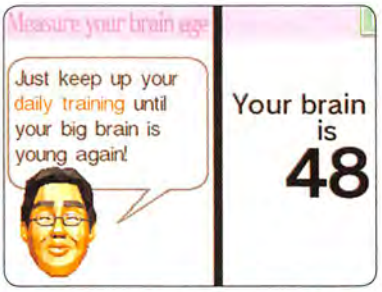
GEARS OF WAR (*Microsoft*, 360)

A team of thick-necked Romo-meets-the-Rock space marines battles it out against giant bug monsters, with the survival of the human race hanging in the balance. If these grunts are mankind's last, best hope, it's pretty safe to say that the whole No Child Left Behind thing didn't really work out.

(RUNNER-UP)

BATTLEFIELD 2142 (*EA*, PC)

Look where global warming left us—fighting over the last habitable land on Earth with giant robot walkers. Sounds pretty cool, actually.



BEST GAME THAT MAY ACTUALLY BE GOOD FOR YOU

BRAIN AGE (*Nintendo*, DS)

But, Mom! The creepy disembodied head narrating this "brain training" game told us that if we solve lots of math and logic puzzles, then we'd get really smart! (Also, every round of *Madden* we play is packed with 100 percent of the USRDA of niacin.)

(RUNNER-UP)

BIG BRAIN ACADEMY (*Nintendo*, DS)

Nintendo's companion game to *Brain Age* comes with more puzzles and fewer disembodied heads, because even the most well-trained cerebrum has to change the workout regimen.

PLACEBO.MEDS

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IS THIS DREAMY POPERA STAR SECRETLY A DRUG-ADDLED, SEX-ADDICTED TIME BOMB? (HINT: YES!)

By Michael Joseph Gross * Photograph by Emily Shur

Who Does Josh Groban Think He Is?

THAT SELF-PORTRAIT IS A BIT OF A MESS, JOSH.

I'm often an overthinker. I overthink things into the ground. And this is kind of me with static and craziness around me, and absolutely just wondering, Why? I'm thinking to myself, How can I think my way out of this?

MAYBE YOU'D DO BETTER DESCRIBING YOURSELF IN WORDS, NOT PICTURES. TELL US WHAT YOU LOOK LIKE.

Well, my mom thinks I look like Richard Gere, but I don't agree. I was at a Dodgers game, and two girls were arguing over whether I was James Blunt or Napoleon Dynamite. I think I kind of look like a Josh. I've grown into the Josh look pretty well. The everybody's-friend kind of look. *Hey, we're having a party, let's call Josh over for a good time!*

DESCRIBE YOUR TASTE IN SEX.

My taste in sex is comfortable. I think anytime you can find a comfortable position, that's always good.

DOES THE BOOTY CALL HAVE A PLACE IN YOUR LIFE?

Does booty text count?

SURE.

My last booty call was actually about four days ago. They don't happen a lot. In life there should be a number of booty-call and booty-text people you can feel safe with.

HOW MANY DO YOU FEEL SAFE WITH?

Maybe two. Two booties.

HOW PUNK ARE YOU?

Oh, man, I wish I could be punk, but I'm not. I'm not very punk at all. I do want a tattoo, though. And I was thinking to myself, If I got a tattoo, my fans would really think differently about me. But I see so many tattoos of me on my fans that I think if I got one it would be all right with them.

WHAT DRUG WOULD YOU NEVER TAKE AGAIN?

Ritalin. I was wrongly prescribed Ritalin when I was younger. I didn't need it, but I did have a bit of a focus problem, and it's just like speed. That was not a good day at school.

HOW ABOUT A RECREATIONAL DRUG?

I'm too much of a control freak. I tried pot once in high school. I felt like *Lady and the Tramp* was the funniest damn movie I'd ever seen in my entire life, and then I ate a whole pizza. I was afraid of alcohol because of those movies in high school where people would get drunk and then end up dead. Oh, my God, those were good actors in those movies.

DO YOU PICK YOUR NOSE?

Only while driving. There's something about being in a car, you think nobody can see you. But they can.

IS THAT YOUR MOST DISGUSTING HABIT?

Part of my whole obsessive-compulsive, overanalytical thing is that I'm a total cleanliness freak, so I don't pick my nose that much, and if I do it's really only to get foreign objects or erasers out of there. But I crack things. I crack my knuckles. I crack my fingers and my neck. I can crack pretty much any part of my body. I'm my own chiropractor. And I'm also really double-jointed. My finger bends all the way back. That really doesn't get me the girls anymore, but it did. That was the one thing I could do in third grade that the girls were like, *Cool, Josh. Hey, sweetie, come look at this freak!*

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE CURSE WORD?

[Four seconds pass.] I'm trying to think, 'cause I have so many. I love to curse.

WHAT DO YOU SAY WHEN SOMEONE CUTS YOU OFF IN TRAFFIC?

"Stay in your lane, fucktard." That's a good one. *Fuck* just doesn't do it anymore.

DO YOU CARRY A LOT OF RAGE AROUND INSIDE?

I've always been pretty nonconfrontational. In elementary school a kid tried to pick a fight with me, and I remember saying, "Hey man, how can we resolve this? Sit with me on the bench."

WHAT FOOD WON'T YOU EAT?

Sea urchin. It looks like baby poop. Which I don't like either.

DOES THAT CREATE ANY SOCIAL PROBLEMS FOR YOU?

You'd be surprised. There's always a bunch of guys at a sushi restaurant: *Dude, you gotta try this. It's delicious. You gotta try this, bro.* I'm not your bro, bro. No thank you. But other than that I'll eat lots of things. I'm pretty easygoing. [BLENDER]

STYLING: NEIL RODGERS FOR CELESTINEAGENCY.COM; PROP STYLING: KADU LENNOX FOR FRANK MANAGEMENT; GROOMING: TERI JENSON FOR FRANK MANAGEMENT.

* Remember: What else can I be but what I am?

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Hi, my name is Susanne, I am still in school studying IM, momentarily I enjoy going out with friends, what do you like to do in your spare time?

TEXT 'BR SUSANNE' To number: '46898'

I don't particularly want to be doing this magazine thing, but here I am... primarily because I need what everyone needs in this life... attention, romance and a relationship of some sort.

TEXT 'BR LINDA' To number: '46898'

I am looking for someone who is funny and smart to talk to and get to know. I am not looking to meet for a hook up or have phone sex with you. I know there are some normal guys out there.

TEXT 'BR KIRA' To number: '46898'

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Penalty for Early Withdrawal?

Can this "Secret Formula" Really Improve Your Stamina and Performance?

Ask Steffanie:

Hey Fellas - If YOUR "Timing" issues are keeping HER from scoring the BIG O - then read this letter that reveals the SEX secret that keeps you out of the penalty box and in the pleasure zone!

Dear Steffanie,

I know a lot of men read your column and could really benefit from this important STAMINA secret my boyfriend and I recently discovered.

As much as I hate to throw him under the bus, my boyfriend's performance was less than adequate when it came to his "timing". He tried hard to please me and I can tell that he believed he was doing a great job, which is why it was difficult for me to tell him the truth.

We've been together for about a year but last month, after what he thought was a "strong effort" for a Saturday afternoon, I couldn't help but be disappointed and I let him know there could be a bit of a gap between his perception of his sexual performance and our SEXUAL REALITY.

I told him that I love him but when it came to the "duration" of our lovemaking, I was often left feeling extremely frustrated – he always "got his" and that if he could "hold out" just a little longer, maybe I could "get mine."

He said he always thought that when he "punched the clock", he was pulling a "full shift." Of course, he was shocked by this huge blow to his ego but after some serious sulking and a whole lot of denial, he realized his sexual stamina really could use some improvement.

"I know he feels great knowing I'm completely satisfied and HE'S the reason why."

He was serious about improving his performance so he did some research and spoke to a doctor friend of his. His friend told him about a number of cheap desensitizing creams on the market that might help his stamina and performance but were known to possibly hurt erection quality and worse, they tend to numb a woman – which as far as I'm concerned, defeats the whole purpose! Great, so now he'd be able to last longer but I'd be numb too! That was the last thing our relationship needed!

His doctor friend also told him that if he really wanted to improve his control and performance and still maintain maximum firmness, he should try a new product called **Vivaxa from the makers of Maxoderm (the #1 topical male enhancement product that's recommended by Leading Physician, Michael A. Savino, M.D., F.A.C.S. for instantly improving erection quality). The ingredients in this new "sex stamina secret" make it different from other products because it contains a clinically tested ingredient that is unlike anything else on the planet! It actually HELPS erection quality and firmness. And best of all, the formula absorbs super fast upon application so it won't numb a woman! Improved erection quality AND enhanced stamina – it seemed too good to be true!**

My boyfriend got a sample and that weekend we tried it. From the very first application, he felt more firm and full than ever before – by the time we'd finished making love, I'D GOTTEN MINE TWICE! Needless to say, this has been a record breaking month for us. I know he feels great knowing that I'm completely satisfied and he's the reason why. And trust me, his confidence wasn't the only thing that shot through the roof!

So Steffanie, please print this letter – I'm sure there's a ton of women out there wishing their men used Vivaxa, a quality control and performance enhancing product that lets him put in the extra time without numbing her! I know they're still offering a **FREE MONTH SUPPLY** if you call **1-800-570-2178** or visit their website at **www.vivaxa.com**. Tell your readers to hurry because supplies were limited when I called.

Pamela B., Nashville, TN

From the Makers of MAXODERM Male Enhancement Formula

Dear Readers,

I did some research on Vivaxa and here's what I found: Vivaxa uses groundbreaking, advanced topical technology. It's the first (and only) sexual performance and control enhancer on the market to utilize Calmosensine™, along with Peptide 171. It soothes overstimulation to help men significantly enhance stamina and performance without desensitizing female partners. Check out Vivaxa by calling **1-800-570-2178** or visit **www.vivaxa.com** and receive a **FREE TUBE PLUS** get **$200 worth of FREE GIFTS** with your order – **FOR A LIMITED TIME.** Don't let her question your staying power anymore. Call today! **GUARANTEED OR YOUR MONEY BACK!**

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LILY ALLEN

IMPISH BRIT SENSATION TALKS SMACK AND PROVES THAT TOPPING THE CHARTS IS THE BEST REVENGE

Lily Allen has only been a pop star for a few months, and already she's thinking about retiring. "To me it's not all about a career," she says, perched Buddha-style on a hotel banquette in Glasgow. "It's about filling this block of time in my life before I move on to the next bit. Musically, I've achieved everything I set out to achieve."

In some ways, the 21-year-old Londoner's accelerated rise mirrors that of 2006's other British phenomenon, Arctic Monkeys. Both trade in snappy, street-smart pop and have translated critical hallelujahs and MySpace buzz into commercial success. "Smile," Allen's deceptively sunny kiss-off to a treacherous ex, topped the U.K. charts in July, and her debut album, *Alright, Still*, became the inescapable sound of the summer. "I signed a really tiny deal, thinking I'd be a kooky underground guilty pleasure. I didn't think it would be a big pop thing," she says, spanning the distance between her huge hoop earrings with a full-beam grin. "And then it was."

Here, bloggers and trendsters have fallen hard for her tart lyrics and infectious rhythms snagged from ska, reggae and New Orleans R&B. Back home, the tabloids squeal with delight over her frank statements on celebrities (her MySpace page bluntly declares, "Bob Geldof is a cunt"; other targets include Madonna and Kylie Minogue) and drugs (she joked about celebrating the success of "Smile" with a line of coke). When strangers meet her, she thinks they expect her to be "mouthier, with my nose buried in a bag of cocaine."

In fact, she's sweet, smart and disarmingly honest. And if Allen sometimes sounds a little too jaded for her age, it's because she grew up fast. At just five weeks, she attended her first Glastonbury Festival with her father, actor, comedian and legendary party-starter Keith Allen (he had a No. 1 single himself in 1990, cowriting New Order's World Cup song). At 15, she was dealing Ecstasy in Ibiza after being expelled from several schools for "bad things." Such as? "I don't want to talk about that," she says with a charming but firm laugh. At 16, she had a nervous breakdown, and she's spent the past five years in therapy.

It's not hard to work out why. "My mum was in and out of rehab," she says. "I never used to see my dad, and I had this evil stepfather who was a complete bastard to me. My mum was so out of her head half the time that she'd forget I was there."

Allen's clear-eyed outlook is what makes *Alright, Still* such a bittersweet treat. To the inattentive ear, it's perky ska pop, but tune in to the lyrics and you'll find her taking chunks out of inept pickup artists ("Knock 'Em Out"), moody doormen ("Friday Night") and, of course, that dastardly ex.

"If you don't want to write boring love songs, and you don't want to write songs about a middle-class upbringing, you have to find something you have in common with other people," she explains. "And people get angry."

So, what does the ex think of being vilified in song? "He sold his story to the newspapers, and he's living off the money he earned from my career," she says. So he can't complain? "He can't complain, but I can. He's a fucking arsehole, and now he's ruined my life twice."

She laughs it off and reveals that she's back with another former lover, the subject of the tender "Littlest Things." Despite the kind of dream start that most pop debutantes would kill for, she claims her top priority right now is distinctly unglamorous: settling down. "I think for most 21-year-olds getting married and having children would be their worst nightmare," she says, grinning. "It seems strange, but that's the pace I've always lived my life at: a few years ahead."

Dorian Lynksey

"MUSICALLY, I'VE ACHIEVED EVERYTHING I SET OUT TO ACHIEVE."

ALICE HAWKINS.

(CHAMILLIONAIRE)

THE HOUSTON MC WHO HAD THE COUNTRY SINGING "RIDIN' DIRRRTAAAAY!" RETURNS

Ask Chamillionaire what hip-hop needs most right now, and he's liable to suggest a rhyming dictionary: "A lot of rappers, they say the word *party*, and you know the next word is gonna be *Bacardi*. You gotta switch it up!" The Houston MC—whose 2005 hit about racial profiling, "Ridin'," propelled him from punch-line-slinging mix-tape don to punch-line-slinging national star—insists that his February follow-up, *Ultimate Victory*, will be all about "getting more creative and witty." For instance? "I wanna let people know Houston is about more than candy paint and grills." Tight-lipped about the producers and guest MCs he's tapped for album two, he says listeners can expect more "commercial street music." "'Ridin'' worked 'cause it's something everyone could relate to, but it still reflected who Chamillionaire is. You can't fool your audience."

Ridin' dirty, and with sufficient leg room.

3 CLAP YOUR HANDS SAY YEAH

BLOG-BLAZING INDIE-ROCKERS HEAD TO THE WOODS AND SHOOT THINGS

> Clap Your Hands Say Yeah scored an indie-rock hat trick in 2005: They sold 45,000 copies of their self-titled debut out of a Brooklyn apartment, turned away major labels and drew the Saint Davids of Rock—Bowie and Byrne—to their live shows. Accolades and backlash ensued, but the band paid little notice. "To be honest, both of those things don't hold much water for me. It's bullshit," lead singer Alec Ounsworth says. For their new CD, out January 29, the band retreated to a studio in upstate New York and took up a distinctly nonhipster hobby. "I had a BB gun and shot bottles, which was a nice release," Ounsworth says. "Unfortunately none of it made it onto the recording."

2 LINKIN PARK

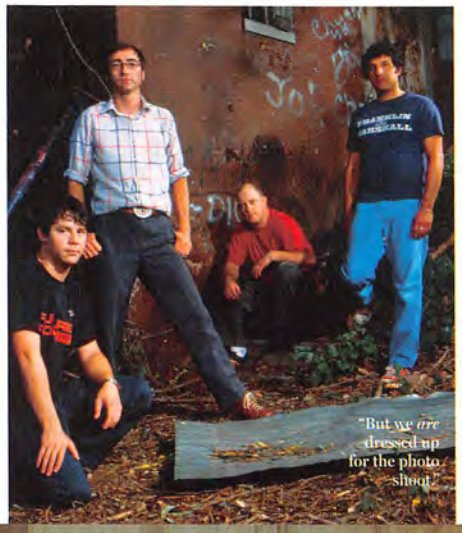
THE JAY-Z–DUETING ROCK BEHEMOTHS STRIP DOWN FOR A "RAW" ALBUM NO. 3

> "It's *not* nü-metal," insists singer Chester Bennington about the upcoming Linkin Park album. "Nü-metal was, like, this little monster we created. Now we're the last ones standing—it's time to try something else." For their first record in over four years, the L.A. rap-rockers are favoring a "rawer" sound—courtesy of producer Rick Rubin—and for the first time they're recording live in the studio. The process hasn't been entirely drama-free: They spent months trying to get out of their label contract (a dispute that's since been resolved), and the album's release date has been pushed back repeatedly (it's slated for March). But Bennington promises it'll be worth it: "You can't paint a masterpiece in 25 minutes. Not everybody is Bob Ross."

CHAMILLIONAIRE: TURE LILLEGRAVEN; CLAP YOUR HANDS SAY YEAH: TIM MOSENFELDER/GETTY IMAGES; LINKIN PARK: IAN BROOK.

7 (THE SHINS)

FOUR YEARS AFTER THEIR LAST ALBUM, INDIE-POPSTERS ENDURE FRICTION AND CRACK WHORES



"But we *are* dressed up for the photo shoot."

> Since *Chutes Too Narrow* came out in 2003, the Shins have hardly been absent from the pop-culture landscape—Natalie Portman's shout-out in *Garden State* goosed the band's two albums to a million in sales worldwide—but if the long wait between releases drives away fickle new fans, that's fine by frontman James Mercer: "Losing their attention isn't something we're worried about." Far more worrisome was the bustling crack den near Mercer's place in a not-yet-gentrified area of Portland, Oregon, which complicated the process for album No. 3, *Wincing the Night Away* (out January 23), and darkened the band's usually perky fare. "There was some real ghetto-type shit happening—crack whores, pimps—and when the house was raided by cops, they blamed me," Mercer recalls. "So we had to get the fuck out. And I felt like I was on my own during all this stressful stuff, hence 'wincing the night away.'"

Maroon 5 most certainly will *not* trash this hotel suite, thank you.

6

MAROON 5

KANYE'S FAVORITE CAUCASIANS RETURN, FUNKIER THAN EVER

It's been a while since we heard from Maroon 5, the L.A. quintet whose smash singles "This Love" and "She Will Be Loved" won the hearts of innumerable young ladies. On their second album, due this spring, singer Adam Levine says they're shooting for "funky" and "more hyper" and name-checks Prince and Talking Heads. But mostly they're trying not to screw up the formula that made them one of the decade's most popular bands. "So many groups fall into that trap," Levine says. "Like, 'It's our second record, we have to outdo ourselves, blah blah blah.' And if it doesn't succeed? Hey, we got to sell 10 million records and play in front of bajillions of people. Shit, what else do you want out of life?"

5

RICH BOY

SCOWLING ALABAMA RAPPER LEAVES DRUGS, MECHANICAL ENGINEERING BEHIND HIM

> Like a lot of tough-talking MCs, Maurice Richards, 22, is a mama's boy at heart. In his teens, he was briefly involved in the Mobile, Alabama, drug trade. But when he realized how deeply his lifestyle upset his mother, he ditched the corner and enrolled in Tuskegee University's engineering department. "At least I knew I could make money that way," he says. Partway through freshman year, he pulled a Kanye: He started rapping and producing and "never went to class again," he says. Soon he'd hooked up with a little-known Atlanta beatmaker named Polow Da Don—now the budding superproducer behind Fergie's "London Bridge" and Ciara's "Promise"—who was drawn to Rich Boy's hypnotic, mangled drawl. Polow, Timbaland and Kanye himself are slated to contribute beats to Rich Boy's 2007 debut, *Product of the Hustle*. And what about Mom? "When the record debuts at No. 1," Rich Boy says, "I'ma buy her a crib."

SHINS: BRENNAN CAVANAUGH/CONTOUR PHOTOS. MAROON 5: PATRICK HOELCK/CELEBRITY PICTURES LA. RICH BOY: RAY TAMARRA/GETTY IMAGES.

JOSS STONE

BRAD AND ANGELINA'S FAVORITE BLUE-EYED SOULSTRESS FINALLY MAKES A RECORD SHE LIKES

Like many young artists who record their first albums under strict adult supervision, Joss Stone is feeling rebellious. "I've had a vision since I was 13, but who's going to listen to someone that young?" says the English R&B singer, now all of 19, whose third record is due in March. "I didn't like my last two [2003's *The Soul Sessions* and 2004's *Mind, Body & Soul*], so I went to the head of EMI and I told him, 'I understand why you didn't let me make the records I wanted to, but you have to now.'" Recording in adopted-home Barbados with neosoul man Raphael Saadiq, Stone drew inspiration from both the island getaway ("God paints a different sunset every day") and her own "exhausting and depressing," yet successful, search for unconditional love. "I found the love of my life," she says. "And it's not a man or a person ... it's music."

Not pictured: Bare ass, toe-ringed hippie feet.

9

JAMES MORRISON

BALLADEER AIMS FOR GROIN AND HEART, NOT TEAR DUCTS

> Though he looks strikingly similar to one exemplar of doleful Brit balladry (Chris Martin) and shares a first name with another (James Blunt), the similarities between James Morrison and his contemporaries end there. "I don't sing stereotypical white-guy music, but if I stood next to a gospel-singing black guy, you'd know I'm white," says Morrison, an effervescent blue-eyed soul singer in the tradition of Steve Winwood, Jamiroquai and that bloke from *The Commitments*. The 21-year-old, who recorded his debut album, *Undiscovered*, while working as a van washer and commuting to London, found inspiration in a childhood spent moving around England and dealing with his dad's alcoholism. "I had a shit time growing up, so I wanted to write songs about how people go through hard times, but I didn't want to write downer songs."

8

THREE 6 MAFIA

MEMPHIS RAP KINGS MOVE TO L.A., LEARN IT'S EASY OUT THERE FOR A PIMP

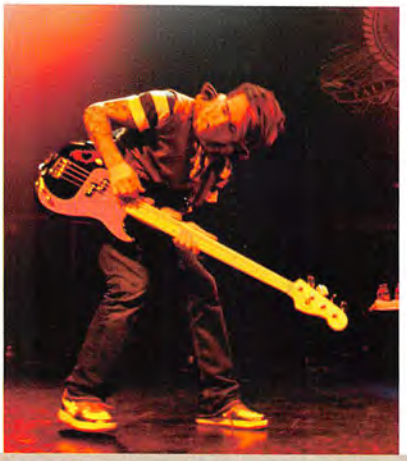
Ever since their Oscar win for the *Hustle & Flow* soundtrack, DJ Paul and Juicy J have been deciding how best to capitalize on the honor. "There's big checks in L.A., and they start in the millions," Paul says. In late January, MTV will air the group's L.A.-based reality show, *Adventures in Hollyhood*. Paul explains, "It's about us moving into a Bel-Air mansion, just trying to chase the paper." The paper chase also includes expanding their movie empire and releasing their latest album, *The Last 2 Walk*. But Juicy J insists Hollywood hasn't softened them: "It's gonna be the same gangsta shit we always had. L.A. is a rough city. If anything, we got more hardcore out here."

STONE: BRIAN BOWEN SMITH/ICON INTERNATIONAL; MORRISON: DEBBIE SMYTH/WIREIMAGE.COM; THREE 6 MAFIA: PHIL ROACH-IPOL-GLOBE PHOTOS.

13

(FALL OUT BOY)

EMO'S CONQUERING HEROES GET THEIR *WAITING TO EXHALE* ON



The last album by Fall Out Boy, 2005's *From Under the Cork Tree*, sold 2 million copies and ensured their place in countless MySpace Top 8s. But this time, Pete Wentz has even grander ambitions. "I'm going for a beef-free year," says the scandal-prone bassist. "We were told by our label, no more flirting and no more fighting, so that's what we're trying to stick with. We'll see. I have a pretty big mouth." For their follow-up *Infinity on High*, out on February 6, the band decamped to L.A. ("Actually, Burbank," Wentz divulges, "'cause we're cheap motherfuckers") and enlisted R&B loverman Babyface to produce a few tracks. "He's done, like, a zillion records that we think are cool. I mean, the *Josie and the Pussycats* soundtrack? Come on!"

Yet another left-leaning artist type.

12

MIKA

GRACE KELLY–OBSESSED WUNDERKIND WHIPS UP A HAPPY POP DEBUT

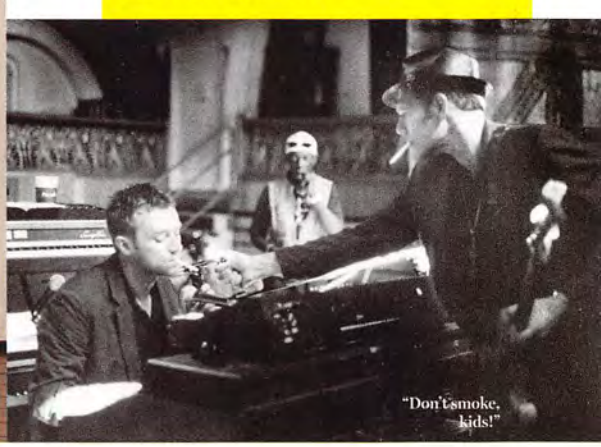
Mika doesn't want to be a singer-songwriter. He wants to be a ringleader. "Harry Nilsson. Prince. Beck. They're all circus masters," the Lebanese-born, U.K.-raised singer, 23, explains. "I love the idea of a solo artist running the whole show, transcending genres, doing anything he wants." This explains the big tent of a debut LP, *Life in Cartoon Motion*, that Mika is set to release on February 13. It's a Technicolor slathering of shiny orchestration, bouncy tempos and copious male falsetto, reflecting the ravenous listening habits of Mika's childhood, when flamenco records, Bach concertos and The White Album coexisted peacefully. "The Beatles taught me that you can put anything into a pop song," he says, "and make it work."

11

THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE QUEEN

GORILLA DAMON ALBARN TRADES ANIMATED AVATARS FOR A FLESH-AND-BLOOD PUNK LEGEND

Blur frontman turned Gorillaz impresario Damon Albarn doesn't do things the easy way. Following the surprising success of Gorillaz' *Demon Days*, Albarn hauled Danger Mouse, drummer Tony Allen and ex-Verve guitarist Simon Tong to Nigeria to record. When that yielded frustrating results, Albarn called in a mutual acquaintance, former Clash bassist Paul Simonon, and the whole gang started from scratch back in England under the nom de rock the Good, the Bad and the Queen. Their atmospheric self-titled debut is out in January, and Simonon is excited about returning to music after two decades spent painting. "We're not all charging about, cranking up the volume," he says. "Our approach is closer to an English musical. The album is a postcard, it's how we feel about living in London and the state of the nation."



"Don't smoke, kids!"

FALL OUT BOY: ALEX SUDEA/REX USA; MIKA: LEE JENKINS; THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE QUEEN: PENNE SMITH

10

KELLY CLARKSON

NOW EXPOSED AS A CLOSET METAL FAN, AN IDOL DECIDES TO BREAK AWAY FROM *BREAKAWAY*

Maybe you saw that YouTube video of Kelly Clarkson swigging Chivas Regal from a bottle and roaring "Sweet Child O' Mine" at an L.A. karaoke night. Her record label saw it, too. "They said, 'We're worried,'" Clarkson says, laughing. "'Are you gonna do a hard-rock record?' Hello, I'd had some drinks with my friends and was singing Guns N' Roses." For her third album, due out late spring, the only great singer in *American Idol* history penned 50 songs, from the funky "Yeah" ("a Chaka Khan/Prince kind of thing") to the moody "Irvine," written on tour in California last year during "the lowest point in my life." The soft songs will be softer, the hard songs will be harder. "Who the hell wants to make the same record?" she clucks. "That's boring. It's the frickin' music industry."

Laughing, presumably not at *From Justin to Kelly*.

15

BLOC PARTY

POST-PUNKERS TRADE PIL AND GANG OF FOUR FOR AALIYAH AND MISSY

> Before starting work on his band's second album, Bloc Party main man Kele Okereke immersed himself in the oeuvre of ... Timbaland and Destiny's Child? "Their music is so microprocessed and complex, but geared toward making you have a good time," he says. "All these far-out ideas of structure and sound married to pop sensibilities." His plan was to translate that space-age R&B dynamic into rock language. Which isn't to say that *A Weekend in the City*, slated for a February release, doesn't rock. The band kept Queen and Roxy Music in heavy rotation while recording, and kept the anger of their debut intact. "There's lightness, there's darkness and there's flat-out aggression," Okereke says. "We like extremes."

14

COURTNEY LOVE

AMERICA'S SWEETHEART PUTS DOWN THE PIPE, PICKS UP THE GUITAR

> By the time her fifth album, *How Dirty Girls Get Clean*, comes out in the spring, Courtney Love will be nearing the age of 43. Her last record, buried under the weight of a tawdry drug addiction, flopped. Does she worry that she has finally exhausted her audience's interest? "Not really," she says. "I feel like I should get a pass because I basically fucked up my 30s. I stayed in my house, took a bunch of pills and said no to everything. I didn't live." *Dirty Girls*, produced by Linda Perry, is a snarling return to form, part hilarious hate-filled spew aimed at an unnamed ex, part *mea maxima culpa* for her narcotized shame spiral. Always a gifted lyricist, Love is brutally forthright on *Dirty Girls*. "There's an honesty there, because I'm not being helped along by Vicodin, by opiates. I'm not even drinking wine. There's nothing taking the edge off me to get to my metaphors."

CLARKSON: GEORGE HOLZ/CONTOURPHOTOS.COM; BLOC PARTY: NIGEL CRANE/REDFERNS/RETNA LTD; LOVE: MICHAEL BUCKNER/GETTY IMAGES.

(AVRIL LAVIGNE)

MRS. SUM 41 LOADS UP ON SUPERPRODUCERS, GETS HER MARITAL BLISS ON

Ask Avril Lavigne about her new album and the Canuck rocker sounds more like a rapper: "It's just the shit. It's gonna blow everyone away." Big talk, although she does have a production-and-songwriting team—including Rob Cavallo (Green Day) and Swedish pop overlord Dr. Luke—to help back it up. Lavigne, who recently married Sum 41's Deryck Whibley, says she's in a "happy place" and that her album, due in April, reflects this while retaining her signature sneer. "There are some really sweet songs," she says. "But overall it's not a mushy fucking record."

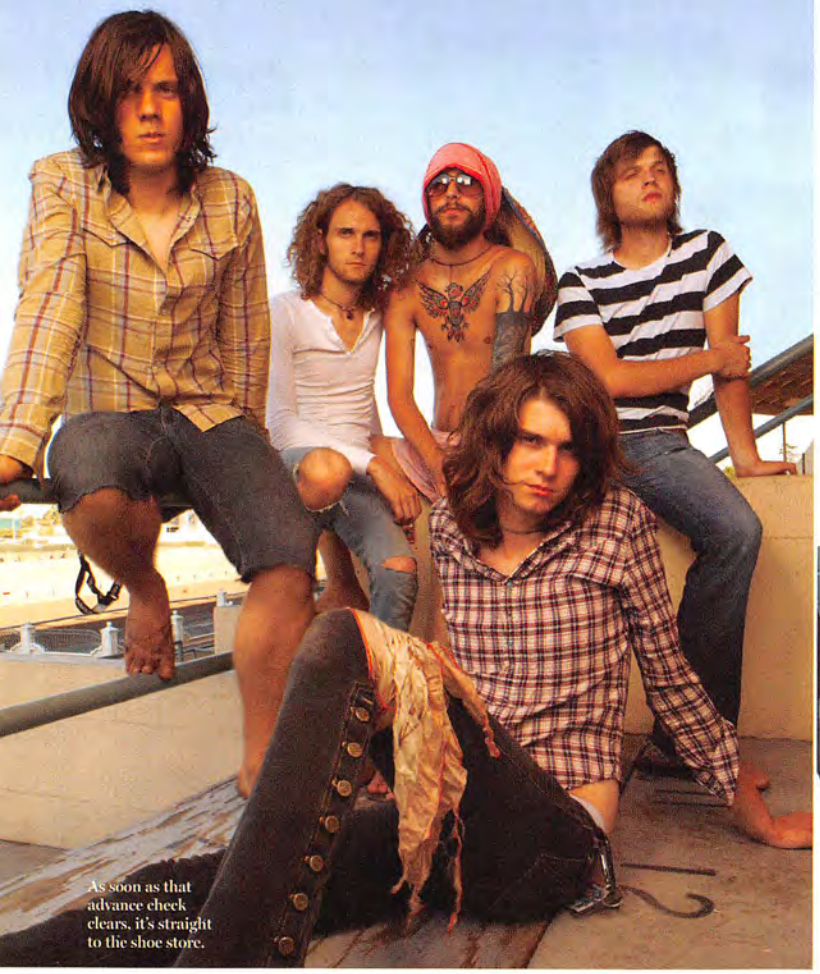
Avril's human-fly costume killed on Halloween.

20

THE ACADEMY IS...

MIDWESTERN EMO BOYS PREP FOR A LEAP INTO THE BIG TIME

In 2005, an unheralded Chicago band called Fall Out Boy jumped from indie label Fueled by Ramen to the majors and became one of the year's biggest success stories. Now their buddies The Academy Is... want to follow in their footsteps. TAI spent November in Silverlake, California, recording their major-label debut, tentatively titled *Chop Chop*. "America is a very chop-chop place right now," explains singer William Beckett. "With the Internet and TV and everything, everyone feels so rushed and pressured—there's always something else on your plate." The album is due in March, and while Beckett has lent his pipes to several other projects, don't expect any big cameos. "We need to introduce ourselves to the world as individuals first," he says. "Maybe then we can talk about having Madonna hang out with us for an afternoon."



As soon as that advance check clears, it's straight to the shoe store.

19

AMERIE

THE "1 THING" CHANTEUSE TRIES HER HAND AT NEW WAVE, BOOTLEGGING

> Why should rappers have all the fun? That's one of the questions D.C.-bred Amerie asked herself when she started work on *Because I Love It*, her spring-'07-slated third album—and it's the reason she decided to help promote it with two mix tapes (*Because I Love It*, volumes 1 and 2) full of hijacked beats, original singing and, yes, rapping. "I'm all about trying different things," she says. The album proper will add "a new-wave vibe" to the raucous funk sound the 27-year-old singer perfected on 2005's "1 Thing." "It's what I'm known for: hard beats and lush melodies."

18

KAISER CHIEFS

BRIT UPSTARTS' GOAL: "TO SELL A SHITLOAD OF RECORDS"

> At home in England, the Kaiser Chiefs' "I Predict a Riot" was on the radio "every two minutes," singer Ricky Wilson says. "I can imagine people getting pissed off. I mean, it started to annoy *me*." The band's leapy, snotty Britpop changed in one big way on a second album, due in early March: "No gimmicks," says Wilson. The Chiefs recorded for six weeks in the British countryside, in a house with a cook, a maid and some dogs. But don't expect to hear string sections or horn quartets: "The day we need a percussion guy onstage with bongos and wind chimes, that's when we should give up."

The American press always seems to look down on British bands.

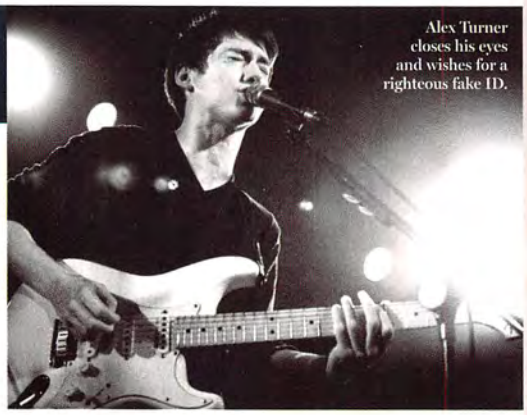
THE ACADEMY IS...: KEVIN ESTRADA, RETNA LTD.; AMERIE: JEFF SPICER/ALPHA/GLOBE PHOTOS INC.; KAISER CHIEFS: JASON KELVIN & STEVIE DEAN; LAVIGNE: JASON NOCITO/CORBIS OUTLINE.

22

ARCTIC MONKEYS

2006'S BUZZIEST BAND ATTEMPTS TO TOP THE BRILLIANCE OF ITS DEBUT, WON'T SAY HOW

> After collecting fans via their MySpace page and now-legendary U.K. bar gigs, Arctic Monkeys released *Whatever People Say I Am, That's What I'm Not* in January '06, and it became the fastest-selling record debut in British history. Countless buzz-band alerts later, the Sheffield foursome (each of whom is still not old enough to quaff a beer in the States) is following up the much-deserved hype with a second, "heavier" album due in April. When asked how the recording for the as-yet-untitled album is going, press-shy head Monkey Alex Turner quips, "West." Drummer Matt Helders tries to provide insight into the mind of his elusive bandmate: "Alex has stopped talking and will only communicate with Morse code."



Alex Turner closes his eyes and wishes for a righteous fake ID.

Stiletto heels and silk sheets: A dangerous combination.

21

(NICOLE SCHERZINGER)

DON'T YOU WISH YOUR SOLO ALBUM WAS HOT LIKE HERS?

Last year, while the Pussycat Dolls toured, made videos, acted all sexy and sold 2.3 million records, lead singer Nicole Scherzinger began working on a solo album. That seems kind of crazy. "*Crazy* isn't the word," Scherzinger says, laughing. "I'm bonkers." She wrote and recorded during "any free second I had," including on a tour bus with will.i.am when PCD toured with the Black Eyed Peas. Her roll of other collaborators is, let's say, bonkers: She did what she calls "an awesome song" with rap producer Timbaland and also worked with Gary Lightbody from Snow Patrol and Tim Rice-Oxley of Keane. "It's less pop than the Pussycat Dolls, a little more funk," says the Hawaiian-Russian-Filipino minx. "I'm bringing in international elements, because I have the face of a new American girl. America's face is changing."

them anyway). "Float On" topped the Modern Rock charts and helped the album sell an unexpected 1.5 million copies, taking the band—formed in 1993 in a tiny Seattle suburb called Issaquah and fleshed out by bassist Eric Judy and drummer Jeremiah Green—from indie stalwarts to *O.C.*-cameoing semi-stars. "We couldn't predict anything," Brock recalls, sitting in the bed and breakfast he calls home in Mississippi. "But we knew that if one song was going to get radio play, it was that one."

Modest Mouse's elevated profile isn't the only thing that's different this time around. About a year ago, Brock mused aloud that he'd love to get Johnny Marr—the legendary Smiths guitarist—to join the band. Dann Gallucci, the group's Marr-influenced sometime guitarist, had just quit; for Brock, the genuine article seemed an ideal replacement. He contacted Marr, and after a phone conversation, the latter flew to Portland to start working on the new album. He's now a full-fledged member of the band.

"I'd heard some stuff of theirs that I really liked," Marr says. "I figured that at the very least it'd be a fascinating experiment." The result is the most straight-ahead, riff-driven album Modest Mouse has ever made—or, as Marr describes it, "Guitarzilla."

Recruiting dream guitarists is a nice by-product of success, but generally, the more the stratosphere has beckoned, the more Brock has dug his heels into the firmament. In part, he ascribes this ambivalence toward success to his "dirt-poor" childhood. "I've never put much weight on money," he says. "My family taught me that if you're crafty you can do well on nothing." At 11, Brock took a job as a janitor—the first in a string of unglamorous posts that ranged from dishwashing to cleaning meat trucks—and he lived for a time in a shed behind his parents' trailer.

His ambivalence also stems from his early education in punk ethics. Brock says he still carries within himself the bratty purist of his adolescence and recalls what it was like when a local Seattle hero named Kurt Cobain became a national star: "It made me grumpier than anything. I hated having to share something with the mainstream."

Brock remembers Cobain coming around his friend's house to cop drugs right after the release of *Nevermind*, and there's something similarly self-destructive about Brock, too. For years, going to a Modest Mouse show was a crapshoot: It could be exhilarating or a drunken mess. Or an acid-fueled mess. Or a cocaine-fueled mess.

Brock says he hasn't done any drug harder than weed in two years—"my fiancée would leave me"—but the first night we meet he drinks three rum-and-Cokes, two Maker's Marks, one screwdriver, a glass of champagne and many, many Pacificos. By 5 A.M., Brock has climbed naked into a hot tub and started breathing fire with a lighter and a bottle of Everclear.

The next day, he apologizes. "I haven't been that drunk in ages. It was my first day off from recording in months. I needed to enjoy it, but ..." He chuckles self-consciously and sighs. "Yeah."

He eats a balanced breakfast—a Coke and a burrito procured at, yup, a gas station—and heads back to the B&B to nurse his hangover. In two days, the band will begin a small-club tour to road-test new songs. Brock admits that pressure to duplicate the last album's success is high, but—lifelong pessimist that he is—he's prepared for the worst. "I'm aware that at some point I might have to find something else to do," he says, puffing a cigarette outside the studio. "It's never too late to learn another trade."
Jonah Weiner

Brock: "No, we will *not* play 'Float On' again!"

AT 11, A "DIRT-POOR" BROCK TOOK A JOB AS A JANITOR.

24
SAIGON

JUST BLAZE–ENDORSED EX-CON MC WANTS TO BE RAP'S MARVIN GAYE

> Playing yourself on television, as rapper Saigon did on HBO's *Entourage*, is either a marketing coup or a credibility killer. This March, the ex-gang-banger makes his case for the former, with his life-imitating-art debut *The Greatest Story Never Told*, helmed by hitmaking producer Just Blaze. Born Brian Carenard, the 28-year-old Brooklyn native, who served six years for attempted murder, says his songs, like the single "Pain in My Life," stay clear of braggadocio. "Right now hip-hop is in a fantasy state," he says. "My music is based on reality. One-hundred-thousand-dollar necklaces are not a reality for most people. I want to make music like Marvin Gaye did, timeless music with substance."

23
FOUNTAINS OF WAYNE

JUST DON'T EXPECT THESE POP MASTERMINDS TO WRITE "STACY'S GRANDMA"

> "We tried to get Ludacris," says bassist and songwriter Adam Schlesinger. "He wasn't available." That's one way to recreate the success of "Stacy's Mom," the 2003 hit that took this dazzling but little-known pop quartet into the big time (a Dr Pepper ad and a video with MILF-maid Rachel Hunter). But, Schlesinger says, "I don't think anybody is counting on us for another one of those. I hope not." FOW's fifth album, due in early spring, holds more witty tales of confused young people caught between destinations and is titled *Traffic and Weather* because "as usual, there are a lot of songs about transportation and travel." Will it sell millions of copies? "Our goal is 12 units," Schlesinger deadpans. "Then if we hit 13, it looks like a runaway success."

SAIGON: MAT SZWAJKOS/GETTY IMAGES; MODEST MOUSE: TIM MOSENFELDER/GETTY IMAGES; FOUNTAINS OF WAYNE: JOEL BENJAMIN; ARCTIC MONKEYS: CELEBRITY PICTURES LA; NICOLE SCHERZINGER: MARTIN SCHOELLER/CORBIS OUTLINE.

25 REASONS TO ♥ '07

DOWN IN THE DUMPS ABOUT HAVING TO SAY GOOD-BYE TO 2006? STUMPED ABOUT WHAT "AULD LANG SYNE" MEANS? PERK UP WITH THESE COMPELLING ARGUMENTS AGAINST OFFING YOURSELF IN THE NEW YEAR

BY VICTORIA DE SILVERIO, JOSH EELLS, LAUREN HARRIS, STEVE KANDELL, CRAIG MARKS, ROB TANNENBAUM AND JONAH WEINER

25 (MODEST MOUSE)

INDIE STARS TURNED UNLIKELY HITMAKERS FOLLOW UP "FLOAT ON" WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM A LEGENDARY FRIEND

Isaac Brock's favorite restaurant in Oxford, Mississippi, is a BP gas station. An Indian family operates it and, along with Snickers, pork rinds and Genessee 12-packs, they sell some of the best chicken curry the Modest Mouse frontman has ever tasted. "I eat here almost every night," Brock says, parking his rental truck out front.

Tonight there's a clerk working whom Brock has met only a couple of times. He's in his late 20s, sporting blond highlights and a shirt stitched with flowers—it's the look of someone who learned about American style from *90210* reruns.

"Hey, man," Brock greets him. "How ya doing tonight?"

"Oh, pretty bored."

"Well, shit, man, you wanna get a beer later?"

The clerk smiles and furrows his brow.

"You should call me," Brock says, bundling the invitation in his lisp-tinged drawl. "I can at least tell you about some good bars."

"You know, really ...," the clerk says sheepishly in heavily accented English. "I want to go to *strips*."

"Shit, I don't know any strip joints around here," Brock says, frowning. "But let me find out. Here's my cell. Call me in an hour."

The clerk takes down Brock's number and thanks him politely, if warily. Brock buys a pack of cigarettes and two Indian dinners, then steps out into the November cold. "I feel for that guy," he says. He lights a cigarette and waves it at the highway overpasses that surround the BP. "Just dumped into a gas station in the middle of nowhere. No shit he's lonely."

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FOR 13 YEARS, Isaac Brock has been indie-rock's patron saint of the lonely. Whipping up gorgeously off-kilter guitar rock, the 31-year-old sings about barren places and the people who inhabit them. His pathos in describing the middle of nowhere has won him a legion of fans across the country.

Though he lives with his fiancée in Portland, Oregon, Brock's been going to Mississippi on and off for six months, working on Modest Mouse's fifth album, *We Were Dead Before the Ship Even Sank*. Set for a March release, it's the follow-up to *Good News for People Who Love Bad News*, in which Brock's typically despondent themes gave way to uplift on "Float On," a spiraling single about shrugging off misfortunes (since there's not a damn thing you can do about >>

PRODUCTION: LAUREN DUKOFF. STYLING: NAHEED SIMJEE AND JENNIFER JOHNS. PROP STYLING: DANIEL SALIN. GROOMING: VANESSA PRICE FOR THE REX AGENCY.

PHOTOGRAPH BY AUTUMN DE WILDE

Modest Mouse: (L-R) Johnny Marr, Joe Plummer, Jeremiah Green, Isaac Brock, Eric Judy and Tom Peloso.

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